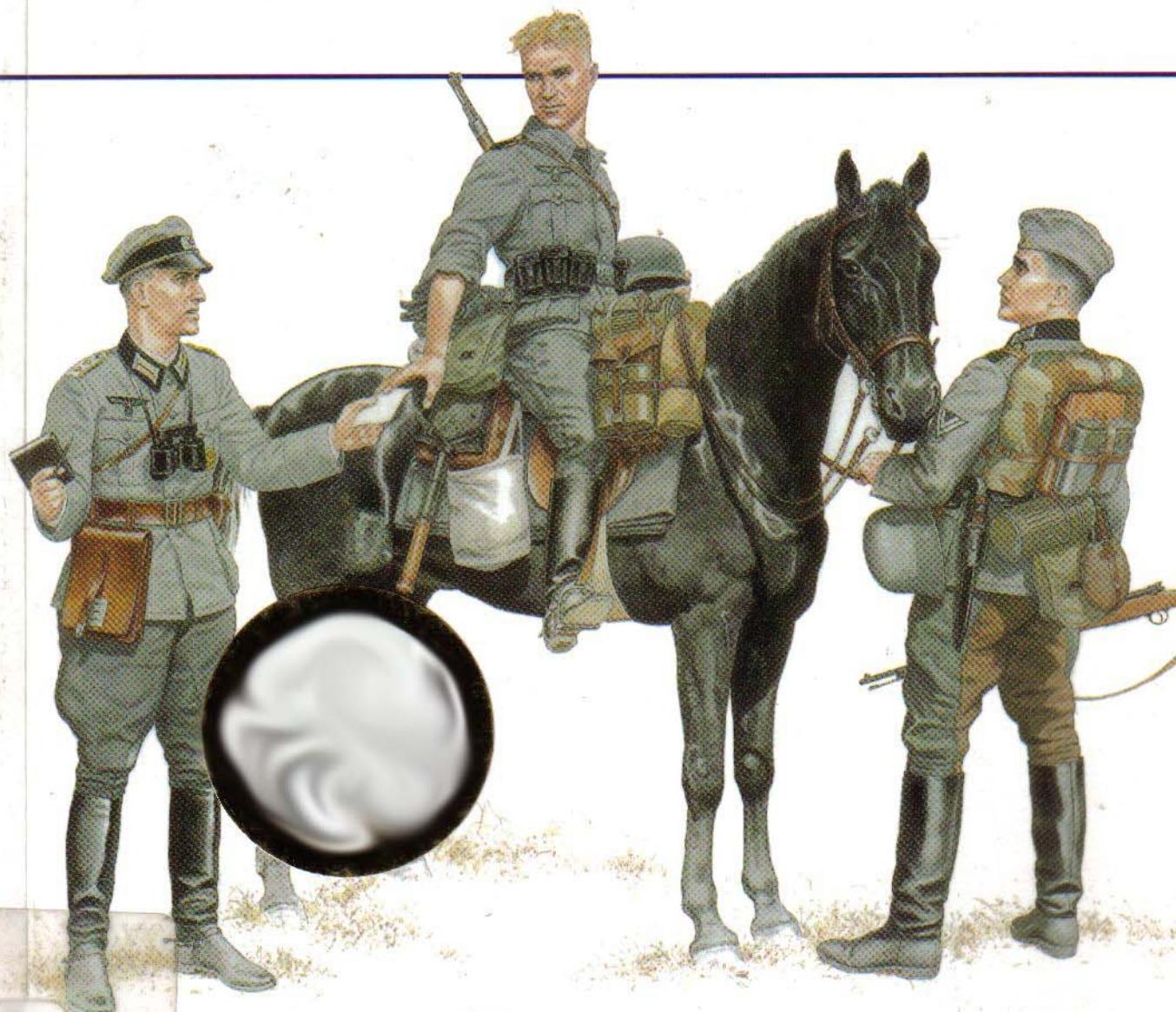


Axis Cavalry in World War II



by Jeffrey T. Fowler • Illustrated by Mike Chappell

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Series editor Martin Windrow

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AXIS CAVALRY IN WORLD WAR II

GERMAN ARMY CAVALRY 1939-41

Pre-war Reiter (trooper) of the 5.Reiter Regiment, based at Stolp – note the number stitched in yellow on his dark green shoulder straps. The absence of the National Socialist eagle and swastika badge from the right breast dates this photo to before October 1935; and note the collar patches with the silver lace bars still mounted on a backing of cavalry yellow. He wears the early M1918 steel helmet with ear cut-outs, which persisted in use in the cavalry until the late 1930s, to the extent that it was erroneously termed the 'cavalry helmet'.
(Brian Bell Collection)



THE GERMAN ARMY (Reichsheer) permitted by the Treaty of Versailles following World War I totalled 100,000 men in ten divisions – seven infantry and three cavalry. The 18 cavalry regiments represented 16.4 per cent of total manpower; it has been suggested that the Entente powers assumed that cavalry posed little threat and, being expensive to maintain, would restrict expenditure on other military priorities. In about 1928 the composition of a mounted regiment was as follows:

Regimental HQ (with trumpet corps)

Signals platoon

4x sabre squadrons – each 4 officers + 170 men, 200 horses

Replacement & training squadron – 4 officers + 110 men, 170 horses

Machine gun platoon – 4x MG08

Seven of the 18 mounted regiments had an additional fifth squadron (4 officers, 150 men, 180 horses), which in time of war was to be detached to the command of an infantry division to provide a reconnaissance element.

In 1933 the advent of the Nazi government brought rejection of the Versailles limitations and a rapid expansion and re-equipment of the new Wehrmacht. In 1934–35 the 4th, 7th, 11th, 12th & 16th Mounted Regts were transformed into the 1st & 3rd Rifle Regts, 1st, 2nd & 3rd Motorcycle Bns, and 2nd, 3rd & 6th Panzer Regiments. Other regiments were stripped of individual squadrons to provide the nucleus for anti-tank and armoured reconnaissance units. (In 1936 and 1938 the 4th & 11th Regts returned to the cavalry role, the latter with Austrian personnel).

Reorganisation and re-equipment

In 1936 a modernisation and expansion of the cavalry units began. The drive for mechanisation and tactical innovation impacted upon the cavalry, changing the composition of mounted units in fundamental ways (although the on-going process of re-equipment would not be completed before the outbreak of war). At the most basic level, the cavalry received the shortened Karabiner 98k, a handier version of the old M1898 Mauser rifle; although it became the Wehrmacht's standard issue, this was specifically designed for mounted troops.

The heavy water-cooled Maxim sMG08 machine gun, and the air-cooled Dreyse IMG13 which briefly became the standard light machine gun, were replaced by the vastly superior MG34 in two versions, for use both as a section light automatic and a sustained fire support

weapon. Mortars of both 81mm and 50mm calibre entered the cavalry unit's inventory, adding an effective indirect fire capability.

The cavalry experimented in varying degrees with armoured cars, bicycles and motorcycles. These created a more diversified unit capable of handling a wider range of missions. Regiments received motorised anti-tank, pioneer and armoured scout car platoons, the latter with two Kfz 13 machine gun cars and one Kfz 14 radio car. From 1936 the Kfz 69 'Krupp-Protze' six-wheeled truck, capable of some off-road movement, began to be issued as a towing and transport vehicle. Tactical doctrine also had to be revised in order to take advantage of the new equipment.

Perhaps the aspect most important to the continuing relevance of cavalry was that of integral howitzers and anti-tank guns. The standard gun-howitzer, the heaviest weapon employed by cavalry units, was the 7.5cm IIG18 ('light infantry gun' – although termed in cavalry units the 'cavalry gun'). The regiments designated *Reiter* or 'Horse' (see 'Army and Troop Cavalry' below) boasted four of these effective and versatile guns, the *Kavallerie* units six of them. All were assigned to the regimental 'heavy' squadrons, designated as 5th Sqn in 'Horse' units and 10th in 'Cavalry' units.

'Horse' regiments received a platoon of three 37mm anti-tank guns as part of the HQ element; 'Cavalry' units had six, in a designated 9th Squadron. Initially these weapons proved reasonably effective, though wartime improvements in armour design soon rendered them obsolete. The IIG18 howitzers were also sometimes used in the anti-tank role.

In human terms the rapid expansion of the Army also had its impact. In Germany, as in most European armies, the cavalry had a high social cachet and had tended to attract officers from the conservatively minded aristocracy. They now had to deal with the 'new man' concepts promoted by Nazi ideology, which stressed the equality of every able-bodied man serving the state. The importance of a *Junker* family background in the selection of cavalry officers declined, and this created some friction as those of more mundane middle-class origins filtered into the officer corps. It also served a useful purpose, however, in encouraging innovative thinking. However, it would be a caricature to suggest that a traditional cavalry background disqualified officers for skilled and energetic leadership in this new Wehrmacht. Generals Baade, Höpner, von Kleist, Lindemann, Eberhard von Mackensen, von Saucken, Geyr von Schweppeburg, Stumme, von Weichs and Westphal were only a few of the cavalry generals who gave the lie to any such assumption.

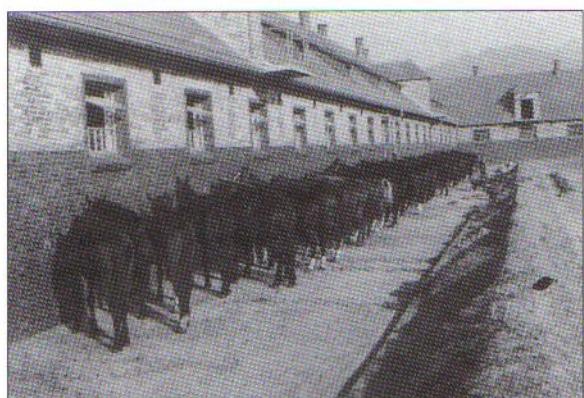
Bicycle Troops

One squadron per regiment became bicycle-mounted infantry. This seems odd today; but most European armies experimented with bicycle



A pre-war German cavalry stable; the spotless cleanliness of the floor indicates the amount of work demanded. The stalls are the walk-in type and floored with straw. The M1925 saddles and issue bridles are hung on racks and pegs, with the saddle blankets folded across the seats.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)

Horses tethered outside their stable. The stables were substantial structures, some of which are still standing today. Note the many windows for adequate ventilation; fresh air was essential for healthy animals. Stable routine consumed much of a trooper's day, in garrison or in the field.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)



**Table 1: 1.Reiter (Horse) Regt,
peacetime establishment**

43 officers*, 274 NCOs, 835 enlisted men** = 1,152 all ranks;
922 saddle horses, 92 remounts, 4 draught = 1,018 horses.

Regt HQ & HQ Troop (inc. trumpet corps & signals platoon)
18 officers, 43 NCOs, 83 EMs; 48 saddle, 7 remount, 4 draught
4x sabre squadrons
Each, 5 officers, 42 NCOs, 151 EMs; 176 saddle, 17 remounts
Heavy sqn (5th)
5 officers, 42 NCOs, 142 EMs; 140 saddle, 14 remounts

Notes:

* = including officials, medical officers, veterinarians

** = including corporals

(Source – Richter, *Cavalry of the Wehrmacht 1941–45*)

**Table 2: 1.Reiter (Horse) Regt,
September 1939**

39 officers, 2 officials, 204 NCOs, 1,195 EMs; 1,421 horses; 42x MG34 (light), 16x MG34 (heavy), 6x 81mm mortars, 4x 7.5cm guns, 3x 37mm AT guns; 91x horse-drawn vehicles, 1x trailer, 21x cars, 12x trucks, 18x solo motorcycles, 9x motorcycle combinations, 3x armoured cars.

Commander: Oberstleutnant Wachsen

Signals troop:

1 officer, 29 enlisted men; 25 horses – 17 saddle, 4 pack, 4 draught; 1x horse-drawn NF4 signals wagon, 1x radio truck, 2x Kfz 15 vehicles; 1x radio unit (motorised), 1x telephone unit (mot), 3x radio units (mounted), 1x telephone unit (rnd)

HQ & HQ squadron (mot):

3 officers, 150 EMs

HQ group

Recces troop – 3x armoured scout cars w.MG 34, 1x radio truck

Anti-tank troop – 3x towed 37mm AT guns

Pioneer troop – 3x sections with MG 34, rubber boats

Baggage section

1st Squadron:

5 officers, approx. 216 EMs, 254 horses; 4x MG34 heavy, 9x MG34 light, 14x SMGs, 68x rifles; 1x motorcycle combination, 1x field kitchen, 4x Hf2 & 3x Hf1 wagons, + various trucks

HQ troop

3x troops (rnd) – each 1 officer, 44 EMs, 50 horses

HQ group

3x sections – each 13 EMs, 14 horses; 1x MG34 light*

1x heavy troop – 1 officer, 39 EMs, 48 horses; 4x MG34 heavy

2nd, 3rd, 4th Squadrons: as 1st Squadron

5th Squadron (Heavy):

4 officers, 226 EMs, 225 horses; 6x 81mm mortars,

4x 7.5cm howitzers; 20x vehicles

HQ troop

Mortar troop

HQ group

3x sections – each 2x 81mm, carriage-mounted, drawn by 6-horse teams

Cavalry gun troop

HQ group

2x sections – each 2x 7.5cm IIG18 gun-howitzers, drawn by 6-horse teams

Regimental baggage column – 39 EMs, 50 horses;

11x Hf1 wagons drawn by 4-horse teams, of which

5x ammunition, 5x fodder, 1x farrier; plus various trucks, sanitation vans, etc.

Notes:

* = Up to the start of the Russian campaign, June 1941, each horse and bicycle troop was additionally issued 2x Panzerbüchse 39 anti-tank rifles.

(Sources – Piekalkiewicz, Richter)

troops, which had real possibilities for rapid movement in Western Europe, with its dense network of metalled roads. Under favourable conditions bicyclists could in fact cover long distances faster than horsemen, and more quietly; they could deploy for action without losing the services of horse-holders; and, of course, their 'mounts' required none of the specialist care of horses. Bicycle troops proved very successful in the West in 1940, although the medieval quality of most roads on the Eastern Front often reduced them to 'foot-sloggers'. By 1938 'Cavalry' regiments had acquired a complete, partly motorised 2nd (Bicycle) Battalion, giving the unit 11 squadrons. The heavy weapons in bicycle units were carried by motorcycle/sidecar combinations; each squadron had 17 of these, plus four solo motorcycles and seven all-terrain cars and trucks.

'Army' and 'Troop' Cavalry

An important distinction was made between 'Army Cavalry' and 'Troop Cavalry'. 'Army Cavalry' referred to complete horse-mounted manoeuvre units with weak motorised support elements, which would operate in mounted formations directly under higher commands in time of war; these kept the title *Reiter Regiment* (which is translated throughout this text as Horse Regiment). 'Troop Cavalry' were partly motorised, partly horse-mounted, partly bicycle units which, upon mobilisation, would be dispersed to provide the reconnaissance battalions of infantry divisions; these units took the title *Kavallerie Regiment*.

The home depots of the 15 regiments were as follows:

1.Reiter Regt – Insterburg; 2.Reiter Regt – Angerburg; 3.Kav Regt – Göettingen; 4.Kav Regt – Allenstein; 5.Kav Regt – Stolp; 6.Kav

Regt – Darmstadt; 8.Kav Regt – Oels; 9.Kav Regt – Fürstenwalde; 10.Kav Regt – Torgau; 11.Kav Regt – Stockerau; 13.Kav Regt – Lüneburg; 14.Kav Regt – Ludwigslust; 15.Kav Regt – Paderborn; 17.Kav Regt – Bamberg; 18.Kav Regt – Stuttgart.

Each regiment was stationed within one of the Wehrkreis or military regions, and assigned to the command of a (non-motorised) infantry or mountain army corps. Between 1933 and 1938 Riding & Driving Schools for training officers, reserve officers and NCOs with saddle and draught horses were set up in each Wehrkreis.

In addition to the reconnaissance (*Aufklärungs*) battalions for infantry divisions, a mounted scout and security platoon was also provided for the headquarters element of each active infantry regiment from 1935. These ‘infantry horse platoons’ – of 32 men and 33 horses, plus a combat train of one Hfl wagon with a two-horse team, and one cyclist – were drawn partly from mounted units of the State Police with Army cavalry officers and NCOs, but some were detached complete from the cavalry units.

* * *

The fact that the German Army, so forward-looking in many ways, still envisaged a major role for horses at a time when other armies were retiring them may seem paradoxical. In fact it was the rapid expansion of the forces that ultimately ensured the continuing existence of horse units. It was a question of production versus demand: German industry could not keep pace with the rapid expansion of the Army, which saw a huge increase in manpower (from ten to 55 divisions between 1933 and 1939), but a much slower rise in the nation’s annual capacity for producing iron and steel. Hence, the motorisation programme was far behind that of many other countries when hostilities broke out in September 1939; of the 55 divisions, only 14 were fully motorised.

There was thus a continued reliance on the horse in both saddle and draught roles; horses still provided some 70 per cent of the heavy lift and transport capacity, including much of the artillery transport. Since the majority of the infantry divisions remained unmechanised, they also continued to need mounted reconnaissance units on campaign. Each 1939 infantry division of 17,200 men included 5,375 horses on its wartime establishment. The horse-drawn Hfl and Hf2 transport waggons/weapons carriers remained in widespread use throughout the war.



A pre-war cavalry patrol; the man on the right wears a Gefreiter's (lance-corporal's) single chevron on his left arm only. His rifle is carried to his left rear in the saddle boot, which was later eliminated.

In the old volunteer Reichswehr, equestrian training was strict and conducted along the lines of classical ‘dressage’. Recruits rode for several hours daily in the riding hall under the critical eyes of both NCOs and officers. They also spent many hours perfecting their cross-country riding and jumping skills – critical for military riding, so that the trooper’s mind was not preoccupied with such things when on active service. A total of 3,000 hours was specified for a recruit’s equestrian training. After 1935, with the reintroduction of conscription and a limit of ten per cent volunteer recruitment for the cavalry, the Army initially had only a year to train a trooper. Riding instruction was cut to one hour a day, the emphasis shifting to weapons and tactical training, in which the trooper was required to meet the same standards as the infantryman. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)



The ubiquitous Hf1 transport wagon and weapons carrier; this weighed 650kg (1,430lbs) empty and could carry a load of 750kg (1,650lbs). Note the low profile canvas cover, and the team's M1925 breast harness. Reins were of hemp or (as here) leather; an outrider was sometimes used. The horse in the foreground is a fine Haflinger. The soldier beside the driver is cradling an animal companion in his lap.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)



A fine shot of troops posing with their draught horses. The transport and supply services of the Wehrmacht remained approximately 70 per cent horse-drawn throughout the war.

The size of the horse on the right is truly remarkable.
Animals were classified as sZW (heavy draught horse for the artillery), sZK (heavy draught horse for other branches), or ssZ (very heavy horses – in British terms, ‘carthorses’ like this fine beast). (Paul L.Johnson Collection)

After mobilisation in 1939, the Wehrmacht included some 2,740,000 men, 183,000 motor vehicles, 94,000 motorcycles – and 514,000 horses. Of the saddle horses, the huge majority were assigned to the ‘Troop Cavalry’ within divisional mixed reconnaissance battalions. The basic composition of these Aufklärungs Abteilungen was:

Bn HQ

Signals platoon (part motorised)

Mounted squadron (see Table 2)

Motorcycle squadron

Heavy squadron (motorised)

(Total firepower included 3x armoured cars, 25x MG34 light, 8x MG34 heavy, 3x 50mm mortars, 4x 81mm mortars, 3x 37mm AT guns, and 2x 7.5cm guns.)

Only the 1st Cavalry Brigade, based in East Prussia, survived in the ‘Army Cavalry’ role. This formation (see Tables 1, 2 & 3), built around the 1st & 2nd Horse Regiments, was the subject of experiments to determine if horsed cavalry still had a legitimate tactical role on the modern battlefield. It would be expanded to divisional strength in the winter of 1939–40 as a result of its relatively successful showing during the Polish campaign.

Table 3: 1st Cavalry Brigade/Division, 1939–41

(A) 1st Cavalry Brigade, mobilised establishment 1939

6,684 all ranks, 4,552 horses; 409x horse-drawn vehicles, 427x cars & trucks, 153 motorcycle combinations, 165 solo motorcycles, 6x armoured scout cars.

Brigade HQ

1st Horse Regiment (as Table 2)

2nd Horse Regiment (as Table 2)

1st Bicycle Battalion:

Signals platoon (mot)

3x bicycle squadrons – each 195 men, 9x MG34 lt,

4x MG34 hvy, 3x 50mm mortars#

1x heavy squadron:

AT ptn – each 3x 37mm

2x cavalry gun ptns – each 2x 7.5cm

1x mortar ptn – 6x 81mm

1st Horse Artillery Battalion:

HQ battery

3x horse batteries – each 4x 7.5cm**

AT company (mot) – 12x 37mm*

AA company (mot) – 12x 20mm*

Pioneer company

Signals company*

Supply*** & Administration:

2x light motorised transport columns

2x horse-drawn transport columns

1x light motorised fuel column

Workshop platoon

Supply platoon

Medical company (mot)

Ambulance platoon

Veterinary company

Notes:

* = not activated in time for Polish campaign

** = only two batteries activated

*** = not fully activated

= before June 1941, each horse and bicycle troop additionally issued 2x Panzerbüchse 39 AT rifles

(B) 1st Cavalry Division, ordered formed 25 October 1939

1st Cavalry Brigade (as A above)

2nd Horse Brigade (formed 7 December 1939):

21st Horse Regiment (I Btl, 1st–5th sqns, formed from 8th, 28th, 162nd Recce Bns; II Btl, 6th–10th sqns, from 7th, 54th, 14th Recce Bns.)

22nd Horse Regiment (I Btl from 3rd, 17th, 173rd Recce Bns; II Btl, from 21st, 30th, 156th Recce Bns)

2nd Horse Artillery Battalion

(C) Reorganisations 1940–41

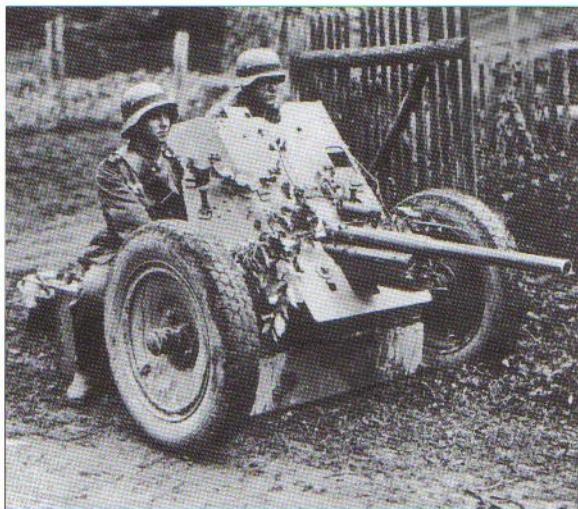
2 February 1940 II/21st Horse Regt disbanded; remaining three mounted regts of division equalised at 2 bns each of 4 sabre sqns, plus 9th (Heavy) and 10th (HQ) Sqns.

2 April 1941 2nd Horse Bde redesignated 1st Horse Bde, comprising: 1st Horse Regt (I, II); 2nd Horse Regt (I, II); 21st Cavalry Regt (1st–5th sqns); motorcycle bn, with 5 support batteries; 1st Horse Arty Regt (I, II, III). Divisional bns designated 40th, except 86th Cav Signals Bn.

28 November 1941

1st Cavalry Division redesignated 24th Panzer Division.

(Sources – Piekalkiewicz, Richter)



The 37mm anti-tank gun, the standard Wehrmacht weapon at the outbreak of war but obsolete by the end of 1941. The crew wear coloured exercise bands on their helmets – cf Plate A.

Column of twos near the Somme River, France, 1940. These troopers, possibly members of the 1st Cavalry Division, sport a combination of both the M1935 front saddle packs and the M1940 rear saddlebags. They still carry sabres – cf Plate A. (Imperial War Museum RML225)

GERMAN ARMY CAVALRY OPERATIONS, 1939–41

1st Cavalry Brigade in Poland, 1939

The Wehrmacht's only 'Army Cavalry' formation was blooded in Poland on the early morning of 1 September 1939. The 1st Cav Bde, shielding 3rd Army's eastern flank in its thrust south-eastwards from East Prussia, advanced with 1st Horse Regt in the van. The initial border crossing was lightly opposed and the first objective, the town of Mysejnice, was taken after a bombardment by artillery and mortars. The brigade encountered the Polish 7th Uhlans in the vicinity of Frankowo on 3 September. The lancers were driven off, as was a Polish attack on brigade headquarters. The

brigade crossed the Narew River as the lead element of 3rd Army on 5/6 September. Assigned to the 12th Inf Div, the brigade was attacked by Polish infantry, who were repulsed only with difficulty; some documents were burnt to avoid their falling into enemy hands. Poland experienced a severe drought in the summer and autumn of 1939; this compounded the problems of mounted operations, as manpower needed elsewhere had to be employed to locate and guard sparse water supplies for the horses and men.

From 8–14 September the brigade continued to conduct reconnaissance patrols throughout its assigned area; mounted patrols were critical in providing intelligence about enemy forces. Such patrols generally consisted of one to three riders, whose task was to observe and report enemy activity. They sometimes attempted to hold the enemy in place until help arrived – a technique with little survival value for the unfortunate scouts. Reconnaissance patrols consisted not only of riders but also of armoured cars, motorcycles and bicyclists. The unimproved roads of Poland, many of them dirt, were ideal for horse and light vehicle operations, but the dryness of the roadbeds could create problems, as the clouds of dust kicked into the air by travelling units could be observed for some distance.

On 23 September, in the vicinity of Krasnobrod, the Polish 25th Uhlans clashed with a force of German cavalry in classic style. The Poles



used their lances and the German troopers their sabres – an extraordinarily rare event. After initially besting the Germans the Polish troopers dashed on, only to be massacred by German machine guns.

Meanwhile, across the entire breadth of the German advance, the mounted reconnaissance squadrons of the infantry divisions served successfully as the eyes and ears of their units. Something of the strain of mounted operations can be glimpsed in the following excerpt from the writings of Lance-Corporal Hormes, serving with a 14th Army division down south in the Carpathian Mountains:

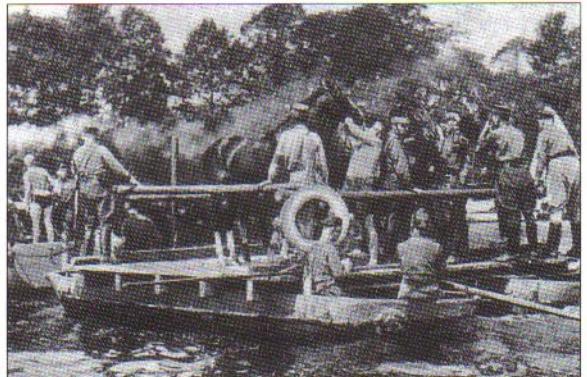
'After a rest of about an hour, we pressed on once more. A broad, sandy road led onwards up through a high pass. The infantrymen were cursing and swearing because our horses were throwing up so much dust. It seemed the hills would never come to an end. It was already deep twilight when we reached the highest point. Beyond, the ground sloped sharply away downhill. I was angry, because in spite of the incline we were having to trot. I felt that my horse, Herzog, could take no more of it – he was stumbling constantly. I called out to the section commander, "Herzog's had as much as he can take!" – and I'd scarcely got the words out when the poor beast fell to his knees. There was no doubt that he was in severe pain, though he wasn't lame.'

'...We had gone 70km on the first day, then 60 on the second. And on top of that, we'd had the trek over the mountains, and early this morning with the advance patrol, about 20km up and down hill – galloping, what's more; and now another 40km on top of that. All in all, that meant we'd gone nearly 200km in three days without any proper rest.'

Cavalry also helped in searching for the 'Hubal Group'. This was a force of Polish cavalrymen and supporters which conducted operations against the Germans from 23/24 September 1939 until as late as 30 May 1940. Major Henryk Dobrzanski formed the initial group from members of the 10th Uhlan Regt, Reserve Cavalry Brigade. This independent force succeeded in occupying the resources and energies of many Wehrmacht and SS units for some months, creating havoc until hunted down and almost annihilated in the vicinity of Kielce. Elements of the Hubal Group avoided the fatal ambush, in which their commander was killed; and they only disbanded when ordered to do so by the Polish resistance leadership upon the news of the fall of France in June 1940.

Poland lent itself to mounted operations. The thick forests and dirt roads were ideal for the hit-and-run raids conducted by the Hubal Group. Conversely, German mounted units were necessary to search out and destroy the Poles. Their horses were able to traverse terrain impassable to motorised forces, and allowed them to stay in contact with the Poles after encounter engagements. Infantry could also traverse the forests and swamps, but their slow rate of march prevented them finding, fixing, and destroying the more mobile enemy.

Generally, despite the handicap of their lack of heavy artillery support, the mounted units of the Wehrmacht performed well during the Polish campaign.



One of the most dangerous and technically challenging manoeuvres for cavalry was the river crossing. If the stream was shallow, a group of riders went upstream and formed a breakwater with the bodies of their mounts while the rest of the unit swam their horses across. The author's correspondent Herr Hans Deckert recalled that he had seen at least one trooper drown during such training exercises. Riders sometimes crossed water barriers without dismounting; they also used rubber boats, the troopers riding in the boats while holding onto the bridles of their mounts swimming alongside (this technique is described in Wehrmacht Manual HDv 316). Rafts were sometimes used as well, as illustrated in this shot of SA personnel making a river crossing; and this could be as hazardous as swimming the horses. The horses are unsaddled but remain bridled for control purposes. Rowers are used for locomotion rather than combustion engines.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)

Cavalry in the West, May-June 1940

Holland is a land of obstacles; military advances may be slowed or even stopped by the polders, dykes, bridges, marshes, and waterways criss-crossing the countryside. Cavalry had an advantage over armour: they could reconnoitre crossing sites swiftly and much less conspicuously. They could also seize the far bank with less noise and while making less of a target of themselves than motorised units. The now-expanded 1st Cavalry Division also served in Belgium and shortly thereafter in France.

The first Wehrmacht unit to cross the Seine River was the cavalry squadron of the reconnaissance battalion assigned to 6th Inf Div; the squadron was commanded by Oberleutnant Georg von Böselager, who would later become known as a champion of cavalry operations on the Eastern Front.

The 1st Cav Div was assigned to 4th Army. The division crossed the Somme on 7 June, securing the left flank of XXXVIII Corps and fighting in the vicinity of Meulen. It reached Saumur on 19 June, but an attempt to seize the Loire River bridge failed – the bridge was blown up along with the cavalry patrol still on it. The battle for Saumur and the 25km of riverbank around the town took place on 18–19 June. Ironically, 1st Cav Div's opponents included the cadets of the French Cavalry School outside the town. The French cadets retreated under orders on 20 June. On the 23rd, scouts of 1st Cav Div reached the vicinity of La Rochelle, and the cessation of hostilities was announced that night.

Theory and practice

The commander of a reconnaissance unit used each of his elements – horsed, armoured car, motorcycle and bicycle – so as to maximise their potential. For instance, the bicycle troops screened the advancing infantry while remaining predominantly on firm roadways. The horse patrols covered areas inaccessible to bicycles, armoured cars and motorcycles. They patrolled the woods, unimproved dirt roads, and areas of broken terrain. The armoured cars, operating in threes, often reconnoitred areas of interest further ahead. All elements or any two might be combined to accomplish a specific mission. Motorcycles operated in the same manner as armoured scout vehicles.

The divisional reconnaissance battalions often combined to form larger elements for specific missions; the mounted squadrons usually remained with their assigned divisions, however. Meeting engagements, in which opposing forces collide unexpectedly, were common; the battalion's heavy support weapons would then be called into play. A mounted unit's firepower was diminished by one fourth in relation to other units of comparable size, since every fourth trooper was detailed to hold his own and three other horses when the unit dismounted to fight. The horses were sometimes tied together in twos facing in opposite directions; this prevented their running away, and removed the need to have a trooper watch over them.

The 1st Cav Div had served the Wehrmacht well up to this point; it had traversed over 2,000km (1,250 miles) during the campaign in the West



Bicycle squadron of the reconnaissance battalion of a German infantry division. They ride M1939 Patria WKC bicycles – many foreign cycles were also taken into service after the fall of France. Khaki canvas cyclists' capes are strapped to the crossbars or handlebars, and Karabiner 98b cyclists' rifles are carried slung. Uniform and field equipment are standard infantry issue. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)

OPPOSITE Men of a mounted reconnaissance squadron with one of the divisions marching into Russia under Army Group Centre, summer 1941. Their task was critical, and such troopers often stayed in the saddle for far too many hours at one time. The senior NCO at left front has his sub-machine gun slung on his back – clearly, there is no expectation of any enemy contact. After 1939 all NCOs in command positions were issued SMGs, normally the 9mm Erma MP38 and later MP40 (although initial shortages led to some variety – one photo shows a Wachtmeister carrying a Steyr-Solothurn S1-100). Captured Russian PPSh series SMGs were also popular on the Eastern Front for their simplicity and reliability. (Bundesarchiv 101I/138/1057/6)



Hf1 wagon, here with a camouflage-painted canvas cover, and a four-horse hitch rather than the usual pair. The larger Hf2, which always needed a four-horse team when in the field, was used by supply columns but was too unwieldy for a cavalry squadron transport. So was the steel-bodied Hf7/11 with rubber-tyred wheels, which was issued in quantity to horsed units shortly before the war; with an empty weight of 1,040kg (2,292lbs – just over a ton), it had a load capacity of 1,720kg (3,792lbs – another 1.7 tons). (Paul L.Johnson Collection)



alone. However, there were problems, and the main one was ‘exclusivity’ – the division’s specialised requirements. The Wehrmacht was more diverse in composition than its adversaries in the West. Excessive diversity is often a weakness in a military organisation: diverse units require diverse supplies and services of all kinds. This in turn requires a larger and more complicated supply and service infrastructure. The Wehrmacht began the war with an over-complicated supply system, which only worsened as the war continued. Any attempt to streamline the system was to be welcomed. The specialised needs of a division-

level mounted formation were many: fodder, grain, medical specialists, blacksmiths, etc., only added to the complexity of an already strained system. The higher command questioned the continuing need for a mounted division.

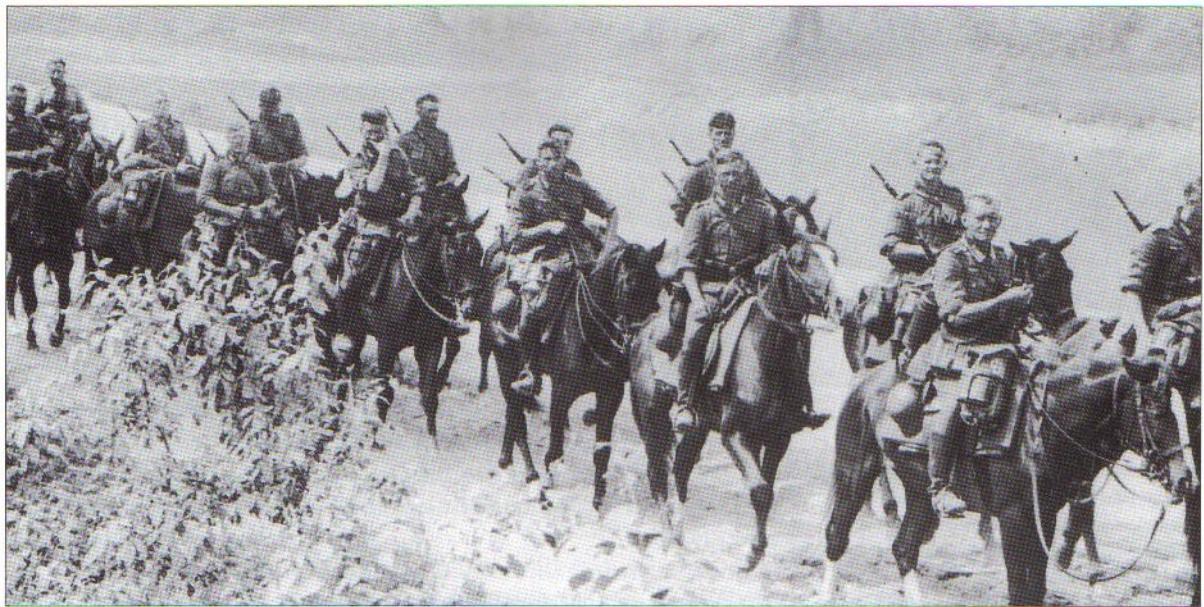
The good service of the 1st Cav Div in Poland, France and the Low Countries ensured its continued existence, however, despite these serious doubts. It was due to the formation’s continued and proven success that it was included in the planning for Operation ‘Barbarossa’, the invasion of the USSR, scheduled for June 1941.

Russia, June–December 1941

Initially, Operation ‘Barbarossa’ was a stunning success. Some horse-drawn elements experienced difficulty in keeping pace with the rapidly advancing armour as the German armies thrust deeply into the Soviet rear areas. The 1st Cav Div, serving with XXIV Motorised Corps of Gen.Guderian’s 2nd Panzer Group of Army Group Centre, performed successfully. They acted offensively, pursuing the fleeing Soviet forces to the Berezina River, and defensively, in combat along the Dniepr River and around Gomel; they also took part in the desperate struggle to close the Bryansk Pocket at the end of September. They showed their value particularly, however, in rooting out by-passed Soviet units from the Pripet Marshes.

As stated in Mueller-Hillebrand’s *Horses in the German Army 1941–1945*: ‘The main advantage of cavalry is its ability to conduct mobile operations in areas where there are no roads. It is true that its ability to cover great distances quickly is much less than that of motorized forces. Still, thickly wooded or marshy terrain hinders the cavalry less than it does motorized forces and at the same time provides protection against armored attack. The fact that artillery and heavy weapons, which may be decisive in pressing an advantage, cannot always accompany the cavalry is, of course, a serious drawback.’

The extreme right flank of Army Group Centre’s advance eastwards just touched the northern fringe of the Pripet Marshes, an enormous area of wetlands, bogs and woods, with



few if any decent roads, which lies between Pinsk and Gomel. The 1st Cav Div was the only non-motorised formation in 2nd Panzer Group. Screening the Panzer Group's extreme right flank, the troopers were able to penetrate the northern part of the marshes, which had a dual effect: the wetlands formed a barrier to German armoured units, but also aided 1st Cav Div by protecting it from potentially dangerous attacks by Soviet armour.

The Pripyat Marshes are approximately 350km in length and 150km in width (220 miles by 95 miles). Separating Army Group Centre from Army Group South, they thus created an exploitable gap – a deep and menacing pocket from which by-passed Soviet units could strike at the ever-extending supply lines of both army groups. The composition of the Wehrmacht forces – rapidly moving armour followed by slow-moving infantry – also created a gap between the leading and follow-up formations which presented a tempting target for Soviet exploitation. The 1st Cav Div provided a critical link, shielding the spearhead divisions from enemy attacks from the flanks and rear. An example of the efficacy of cavalry in this regard was given on 18–19 October 1941:

'...The 1st Cavalry Division mopped up the extensive forests south and south-east of the town of Navlya and the river of the same name. This forest area was about 30km long and about 15km wide, yet it was only a small sector of the area within which the Russian forces south of Bryansk had been encircled ... Advancing on a broad front, the mounted elements of the 1st Cavalry Division combed this entire area for two days and captured 9,322 prisoners, 39 guns (19 of which were 180mm guns), 8 anti-tank guns, 7 mortars, 37 machine guns, 11 prime movers, 80 trucks, 250 horse-drawn vehicles, 1 complete ammunition train, and 1 field hospital.'

Marching east: Operation 'Barbarossa', June/July 1941. A typical cavalry column in the heat of Russia, where the dust kicked up by cavalry columns added to the infantrymen's grumbling. Note the relaxed appearance of the riders; the parade grounds of Germany were far behind them. (Bundesarchiv 101I/266/56/15)





The horse seen in the arched shafts of this *panje* wagon is the stereotypical draught animal of Poland and Russia: small, sturdy, able to subsist on very little and endure hardship, and well acclimatised to extreme cold. The horse and its wagon or sled were often pressed into service by German troops, despite orders to the contrary. The *panje* horse was able to live on sparser and worse rations than the German breeds, which were finicky about their fodder. Note the size difference between these animals. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)

OPPOSITE The MG34 7.92mm machine gun was the workhorse of the Wehrmacht. Although later partially replaced by the MG42, the MG34 – seen here in its heavy version, on a sustained fire mount – was a fine weapon with an excellent reputation for reliability, and its optional optical sight was a technical innovation of the first order. From 1936 this weapon replaced the old water-cooled Maxim sMG08 throughout the cavalry. Not only did the MG34 have greatly improved firepower, it was also dramatically less demanding of manpower and draught animals – in its light version, with a bipod mount, it could be carried in a saddle boot by one of its two-man crew, while the sMG08 had needed a six-horse team. (CARL, Ft Leavenworth, KS)

The successes of 1st Cav Div in the Pripet Marshes were not enough to save it, however. The division was withdrawn to France before winter fell, handing its 17,000 high quality horses over for use by infantry divisions; and its colours were formally retired in February 1942. This apparently brought to an end the employment of divisional-size mounted units. The 1st Cavalry Division was officially converted into the 24th Panzer Division on 28 November 1941 – though the new formation kept the old ‘leaping horsemanship’ divisional insignia, and the cavalry’s traditional golden-yellow piping was worn on the new black Panzer uniforms. (The 24th Pz Div returned to Russia for the summer 1942 offensive with 6th Army, only to be wiped out at Stalingrad the following winter.)

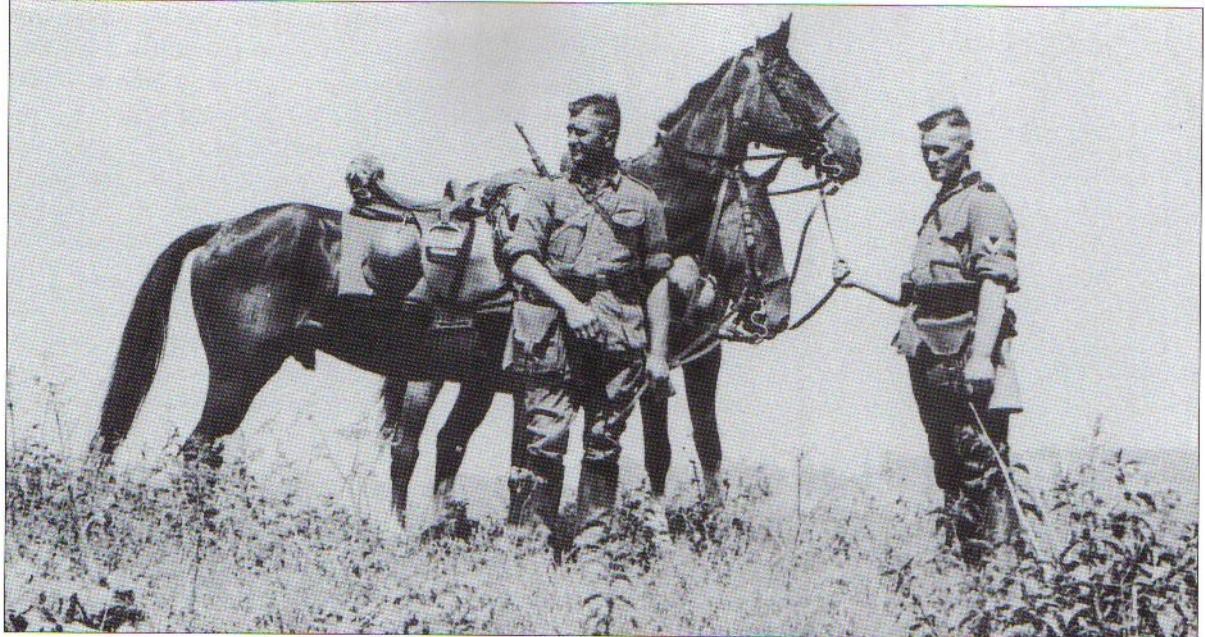
Meanwhile, the mounted squadrons of the divisional reconnaissance battalions continued to perform valuably. Typically, the daily requirement during advances called for three patrols of two sections (minimum), with each section including a radio team. The three patrols screened the divisional line of advance, with one patrol on each flank and one along the central axis of advance, all three moving about 10km (6 miles) ahead of the main body. The additional sections and the heavy squadron remained in reserve if possible.

Sometimes the patrols encountered Red Army cavalry. Herr Heinrich Deckert, then an NCO from the 17th Cav Regt serving in such a mounted unit, described during an interview with the author an encounter with a unit of Red Army Cossacks while participating in the drive on Moscow with Army Group Centre in 1941. He recalled that the Cossacks refused to engage, always seeming to glide away from the advancing German horsemen at a consistent rate of speed on their tough little steppe horses. Herr Deckert’s patrol pursued, but the troopers on their big German warmbloods failed to make contact with the fleeing Cossacks.

The lessons of winter

Despite the decision to disband the Army Cavalry, the value of mounted troops per se was not in question. The Waffen-SS was planning the formation of new mounted forces; and the many mounted reconnaissance squadrons and mounted infantry detachments continued to perform invaluable services for their parent units. Approximately 85 reconnaissance battalions were serving with the Wehrmacht in Russia at this point. They were difficult to organise effectively for specific missions; nevertheless, they performed well – at the cost of being ground down by continual combat as the mobile ‘fire brigades’ of the non-mechanised infantry divisions. In the event, the experience of the terrible winter of 1941–42 would prompt the high command to actually form new regiments of mounted troops. This was due in large part to the unexpected problems experienced by the German armoured forces.

As is notorious, the Russian winter counter-offensive of December 1941 caught the Wehrmacht unprepared. Paralysed by its lack of suitable equipment, clothing and lubricants in the extremes of cold, the German



A short halt on the grasslands of western Russia for a trooper and (right) an Obergefreiter (corporal with less than six years' service). Note the typical haircuts, and the open collars and rolled up sleeves in concession to the blistering heat of the Russian summer – cf Plate B1. Both soldiers carry the Mauser Kar98k 7.92mm rifle slung, butt to the left; this was the standard weapon of the cavalryman, together with – until 1941 – the sabre. Officers and machine gunners carried holstered P08 'Luger' (later, Walther P38) 9mm semi-automatic pistols.
(Bundesarchiv 101I/266/56/27)

Army was forced to give ground at considerable loss. The limitations of the narrow-tracked German AFVs in both extremely low temperatures, and in the deep mud of the autumn and spring '*Rasputitsa*' seasons, rendered them almost useless.

By contrast, horse-mounted units were used throughout the winter of 1941–42, moving from one crisis point to another. Their losses were made good with whatever horses and men were available. Even though their overuse created severe problems within these units, their performance dramatically demonstrated the need for their continued existence, and even expansion. The use of horses increased in direct proportion to the increasing losses of motor transport, which resulted in an increased demand for draught animals for pulling both wheeled and sled vehicles. Interesting expedients during this period included the use of sleds pulled by Russian *panje* horses for moving machine guns and mortars.

One account of the typical use of mounted reconnaissance troops in winter paints a vivid picture:

'The attack of the 446th was the most vigorous in which I ever participated. Commanders and company leaders either fought with gun in hand in the foremost line, or directed the action from horseback close behind, along with the horse-drawn batteries. The cavalry squadron, which had received new mounts since the episode of late November, was drawn up ready to be thrown in as a final trump against the Russian cavalry. Everything was staked on this final effort; to fail to break the encirclement would mean capture and Siberia.'

'In the first onslaught the ridge dominating the area was carried by an attack across the frozen Lyabovska River. With the exception of three badly damaged artillery pieces, the division got all its heavy weapons across, and all of its wounded – over 400 of them, stowed on Russian sleds and carts – but only a very small number of motor vehicles.'

Mud was as great a problem as snow and ice. The then-Oberst Harteneck, chief-of-staff of 2nd Army in November 1941, recalled:



This soldier's greatcoat, gasmask canister, breadbag and canteen are clearly visible. His mess tin is strapped outside the M1934 front saddle pack, and his camouflage tent section around its edge - cf Plates A & B.

The task of mounted couriers was vital, dangerous, and physically exhausting. These rugged horsemen covered vast distances in all extremes of weather, often alone and surrounded by potential enemies. One veteran interviewed by the author recalled that as a farm boy, he hadn't suffered too much, but that city-bred troopers unlucky enough to be picked as despatch riders often suffered agonies of soreness due to countless hours in the unforgiving M1925 saddle.

Note the bridle, of typical European design as used in dressage competitions today, with double reins allowing maximum control. The general issue bit had unusual S-shaped bars; straight bars were also used but were less common. A single rein and simple snaffle bit are also occasionally seen in wartime photographs; such an arrangement is simpler to use, but the rider loses a certain degree of control. All leatherwork was brown with steel fittings.

(Bundesarchiv 146/90/46/12A)

'At first I was only able to visit the divisions assigned to the 2nd Army in a small observation plane. On these occasions I repeatedly flew over the once proud Panzergruppe Guderian, stuck in the mud between Orel and Konotop. Even tracked vehicles lay motionless with burnt-out engines, half sunk in the swamp and easy prey for partisans or for Russian soldiers breaking out of the Bryansk pocket.'

'In Bryansk, at the same time, I witnessed a parade of Division Stemmermann [296th Inf Div], which had followed the same route as Guderian's forces. It had come through all right and was battle-worthy.'

'In spite of the originally paved road, the couriers of the 2nd Army could reach Smolensk from Bryansk only in tracked vehicles. On the same road I saw 5-ton supply trucks break through the pavement up to their axles.'

The deep mud even slowed down horses. Obviously, this was particularly true of the draught animals used to pull artillery and heavy waggons. It was less true of the saddle horses, which moved across country in extreme conditions far more successfully than wheeled or even tracked vehicles.

Shortly before this instructive winter had closed in, the Wehrmacht had chosen to give up its valuable and efficient mounted division, based on a cost-benefit analysis of the outlay in specialised resources and labour demanded by a horsed formation. The revealed inability of motorised and armoured forces to operate effectively in mud and extreme winter conditions had created a need for stop-gap mobile reserves; and the mounted squadrons of the divisional reconnaissance units, augmented by *ad hoc* forces, had to some extent answered that need. Another factor was the enormous attrition of motor vehicles in Russia, and German industry's inability to replace them quickly. Given this dilemma, horses could go some way to fill the mobility gap; the solution was not perfect, but it was available.

The resurgent interest in the use of mounted units was to continue growing throughout the remainder of the war. Mounted units multiplied in size and complexity, eventually resulting in the creation of complete mounted corps.

THE CONTINUING ROLE OF CAVALRY, 1942-45

Anti-partisan operations

Apart from their mobility advantage in mud and snow, cavalry offered a counter to a serious operational problem: the increasing vulnerability of very long supply lines, and a dwindling number of troops available for security duties. These factors, together with a scarcity of fuel, resulted in the creation of several makeshift mounted forces of regimental size or smaller.

Table 4: Cavalry Command for Special Operations, July 1942

CO: Oberst Holste
1st Army Cav Regt (Maj.Laubner)
2nd Army Cav Regt (Maj.Briegleb)
3rd Army Cav Regt (Oberstleutnant von Baath)
? Regt
1st Sqn (ex-mounted sqn, 26th Recce Bn)
2nd Sqn (ex-motorcycle sqn, 26th Recce Bn)
3rd Sqn (ex-motorcycle sqn, 6th Recce Bn)
4th Sqn (hvy.) (ex-6th & 26th Recce Bns)
5th Sqn (ex-mounted sqn, 6th Recce Bn)

(Source – Piekalkiewicz, p.240)

As winter 1941 paralysed the Wehrmacht, local sleds were commandeered for transporting everything possible; this appears to be a load of 7.5cm ammunition for the 'cavalry gun' at left.
Effective in both the direct fire and high-trajectory roles, with a claimed maximum range of 9,245m (10,110 yards, or 5.75 miles), the IIG18 was capable of eight to ten shots per minute in skilled hands; its split-trail carriage gave 60 degrees of traverse without movement.
Weighing 1,120kg (2,470lbs), it could be manhandled with relative ease by its four-man crew on most types of terrain. It was originally pulled, with a limber, by a six-horse team, and had spoked wheels; later these became steel with rubber tyres for use with motorised towing vehicles.
(CARL, Ft Leavenworth, KS)



The huge distances and vast numbers of men involved, the nature of some of the terrain, and the conduct of the sweeping German advances of 1941 and 1942 made it inevitable that sizeable groups of Red Army troops should be bypassed and left behind the German forward areas. The Soviets wasted no time in re-establishing contact with these units via radio and parachutists, and in organising partisan groups composed of civilians and soldiers alike. Railways, supply dumps, and rear area communication centres were all prime targets for attack.

An interesting report generated by Maj.Mendrzyk, on the staff of 3rd Panzer Group, includes observations on fighting partisans in rugged terrain some 150 miles west of Moscow in the summer of 1942:

'Our operations against this enemy did not bring the desired results, since the partisans could quickly evade our troops and escape into the forests and swamps. By the time we succeeded in combing the area the partisans had turned into peaceful peasants against whom we could not prove anything. If peasants were seized who really had had nothing to do with the partisans, it would provide an incentive for the remaining peaceful population to join the partisans. This was all the more true when it was realised that the latter were constantly applying pressure in that direction. A constant surveillance of the area by motorised patrols was impossible. The only possibility for patrolling lay in the employment of cavalry units. The higher command finally reached the same opinion the following summer.'

The principal reason for the creation of Cossack and Kalmyk cavalry units in German service (see below) was their value in security and anti-partisan activities – roles in which, for often sinister historical reasons, both groups excelled. Initially their employment had been expressly forbidden by Hitler himself, but necessity dictated action. Commanders in the field, short on troops, began to employ local volunteers from these groups in increasing numbers despite the official prohibition, and they quickly proved themselves useful.

The war against the partisans soon took on epic proportions. A viable and cost-effective means had to be found to stem the increasingly unacceptable drain on scarce resources and manpower needed at the front. One solution centred on long-range fighting patrols. The patrols moved out at dusk or just after dark, travelling into the forests and swamps and positioning themselves along the trails. They carried silenced rifles, radios for communication with headquarters, and rations for approximately one week. They would then send one element back before daybreak with all of the horses, taking care to remove all tell-tale tracks with tree branches, etc. The rest of the team would then lie up, waiting to ambush unsuspecting partisans. Once in contact, the unit destroyed the Russians

and returned to base to refit for another such mission. This tactic proved highly effective. (It was copied and improved upon during South Africa's war with the SWAPO terrorists in Namibia in 1976–1991; and remains perhaps the most effective means of dealing with enemy irregulars in remote mountain and forest terrain with little or no road infrastructure.)

Anti-partisan operations were especially cruel. Often no quarter was asked or given, and atrocities were committed on both sides. The sufferings of the unfortunate civilian population among whom this merciless war was fought were often appalling. Villagers were pressured for food and shelter by the partisans, who would seldom take no for an answer; and security units took savage reprisals against villages suspected of supporting the partisans, however unwillingly.

Mounted military police

Some military police (*Feldjäger*) were used as horse police during the latter stages of the war. Their main mission was to check soldiers for offences against regulations for the proper use of military horses. An extract from an order of 19 December 1942 from the C-in-C 18th Army illustrates this point:

'The NCOs and men of the military police who receive special training as horse police at the Army School for Service with Horses in April and May 1943 are to be given priority in enrolling in the military police detachments of the division and corps headquarters, and in the Military Police Battalion of the Army High Command.

'They will be most advantageously employed at important traffic points, difficult stretches of road, in places where there is apt to be traffic congestion e.g. in the vicinity of ration distribution points, and as patrols on foot or on bicycles. The main duties of the horse police are to watch over the care and proper employment of army horses. Of particular importance is the issue of brief and pertinent on-the-spot advice.'

Revival of Army regiments and formations, 1942–45

The attrition suffered by the mounted reconnaissance squadrons had apparently whittled down their strength to the point where only some 25 battalions retained effective horsed elements by the time that Army High Command decided to amalgamate them into a centralised mobile reserve force.

One significant, if short-lived experiment was the Army Cavalry Command for Special Operations (*Kavallerie Kommando zbV*), established in spring 1942 on the orders of Gen. Model, C-in-C 9th Army, forming the left wing of Army Group Centre. Piealkiewicz (p.240) states that it was formed from the reconnaissance battalions of VI, XXIII and XXVII Corps plus horse infantry platoons, and he lists three units of the

**Table 5(A): Cavalry Unit
Von Böselager, 1942/43**

28 officers, 1,080 EMs, 1,123 horses
HQ
1st Sqn (ex-mounted sqn, 6th Recce Bn)
2nd Sqn (ex-3rd Sqn, 34th Recce Bn)
3rd Sqn (ex-1st Sqn, 35th Recce Bn)
4th Sqn (ex-1st Sqn, 102nd Recce/Light Bn)
5th Sqn (ex-Cav Unit Trubchevsky – Cossacks)
6th Sqn (ex-mounted sqn, 186th Recce/Lt Bn)

**Table 5(B): Cavalry Regiment
Centre, establishment March 1943**

6,199 all ranks, 5,967 horses; 308x horse-drawn waggons,
8x armoured cars, 115x motorcycles, 237x motor vehicles;
188x LMGs, 42x HMGs, 495x SMGs, 36x mortars, 3x heavy
AT guns, 12x 10.5cm guns, 12x 2cm AA.

HQ
Signals squadron (part-motorised)

I, II, III Battalions (mounted)

each 3x mounted squadrons, 1x heavy sqn (mtd)

Heavy squadron (motorised):

Motorcycle platoon

Armoured platoon

Anti-tank platoon – 3x 'heavy' AT guns – 75mm ?

Artillery battalion:

3x batteries, each 4x 10.5cm light guns

AA bty – 12x 2cm

Engineer squadron

Supply battalion (part motorised)

Veterinary hospital

Ambulance section (motorised)

Cavalry workshop

(Source – Piealkiewicz, pp.240–241)



37mm anti-tank gun with improvised snow camouflage – but the crewman stands out starkly against the background. The German failure to provide either warm or concealing clothing in good time for the first winter in Russia remains a baffling lapse in judgement.
(CARL, Ft Leavenworth, KS)

Another temporary cavalry unit which saw service in 1942–43 was designated the Cavalry Unit Von Winnig.

The most significant step, however, was the formation in 1942/43 of the Cavalry Unit Von Böselager (see Table 5). With the support of Generalfeldmarschall von Kluge, C-in-C Army Group Centre, Rittmeister (later Major) von Böselager enjoyed some priority in raising, equipping and staffing a regiment around the nucleus of his former command, the mounted squadron of 6th Reconnaissance Battalion. By the following spring this battalion-sized unit had evolved into a three-battalion mounted regiment now designated *Kavallerie Regiment Mitte* (Cavalry Regiment Centre). This example would soon be followed in Army Groups North and South, with the formation in spring and summer 1943 of Kav Regt Nord (Prince Karl zu Salm-Hordtmar) and Kav Regt Sud (Prince zu Sayn-Wittgenstein) – note that the old class of cavalry officers was evidently not yet extinct. It is reported that the mounts, equipment and armament of the three units were of high quality. Photos show troopers carrying the new MP43/Sturmgewehr 44 assault rifle (see note, Table 6). Support weapons were transported on local horse-drawn carts.

Since these regiments were all based on amalgamations of the surviving horsed elements from divisional reconnaissance battalions (e.g. in November 1943 the 1st Mtd Sqn of the 12th Recce Bn joined Cav Regt North as its 9th Sqn), the reconnaissance battalions now generally lost their remaining cavalry identity. The rump of these units were brought up to strength with infantry and termed hereafter ‘Fusilier Battalions’, while still retaining bicycles in the 1st Company. (In some cases, mostly on the Western and Italian fronts, recce units did keep their titles and cavalry yellow *Waffenfarbe*.)

The German mounted arm continued to grow in size even as the material resources and manpower of the Reich dwindled. Their success as mobile reserves eventually resulted in the creation of a unified cavalry command structure

Table 6: Army Cavalry/Horse Regiment, 1944

RHQ & HQ squadron

17 officers, 53 NCOs, 262 EMs; 51 saddle horses, 32 draught; 12x MG, 3x 75mm AT; 10 horse-drawn vehicles, 20 trucks, 3 armoured cars.

Bn HQ & HQ squadron

28 officers, 20 NCOs, 81 EMs; 54 saddle horses, 38 draught, 9 pack; 1x MG; 9x horse-drawn vehicles, 4x motorcycles, 11 motor vehicles.

*Sabre squadrons**

Each 3 officers, 35 NCOs, 186 EMs; 196 saddle horses, 34 draught; 6x MG; 9x horse-drawn vehicles, 1x car, 1x truck.

*MG squadron***

3 officers, 32 NCOs, 152 EMs; 146 saddle horses, 60 draught; 1x LMG, 12x HMG; 21x horse-drawn vehicles, 2x motorcycles, 3x cars, 2x trucks.

*Mortar squadron***

3 officers, 39 NCOs, 189 EMs; 179 saddle horses, 76 draught; 4x LMG, 12x 81mm mortar; 30x horse-drawn vehicles, 2x motorcycles, 4x cars, 2x trucks.

Notes:

* = other sub-units are listed as equipped with rifles, sub-machine guns and pistols. Sabre squadrons have a listed scale of 80x rifles, 6x sniper rifles, and 124x assault rifles. See also commentary Plate D1.

** = presumably attached to different battalions

(Source – Richter, *Cavalry of the Wehrmacht*, p.192)



MG34 on sustained fire mount, transported on a local sled. Such improvisation was forced on German units when the Russian winter of 1941/42 brought wheeled and even tracked vehicles to a halt, and mounted fire teams drawn from the reconnaissance squadrons saved the day in many desperate winter battles. The unavoidable reliance on horses for transport of both men and weapons taught long-lasting lessons; the continuing attrition of vehicles, and the failure to replace them, would force the Wehrmacht to actually increase its reliance on horses as the war went on. (CARL, Ft Leavenworth, KS)

on the Eastern Front. In the summer of 1944 Cavalry Regiments North, Centre and South were brought together, reinforced, and formed between them the new 3rd and 4th Cavalry Brigades. (At some point later that year Cav Regt North was retitled 5th Cav Regt, and Cav Regt South, 41st Horse Regiment.)

In July 1944 the 3rd & 4th Cav Bdes and the 1st Hungarian Cav Div (see below) together formed the so-called Cavalry Corps Harteneck – later, I Cavalry Corps – under a general officer of that name. As the huge front of Army Group Centre collapsed under the Soviet offensive of

that summer, the Cavalry Corps received the unenviable task of screening the retreating German infantry columns as they fell back. The troopers performed well, becoming extremely adept at sudden ambushes. They acted as mounted infantry, moving forward on horseback before dismounting and moving silently into ambush positions wearing camouflage clothing and using rubber-soled gym shoes. They often worked in conjunction with armoured vehicles and self-propelled artillery. Their efforts contributed materially to the successful stabilisation of the front along the line of the Bug and Narew Rivers in the early autumn of 1944, and they later fought in East Prussia.

In December 1944 the German units of I Cavalry Corps were transferred to Hungary, where a German/Hungarian force was in peril from a combination of the Soviet advance and one of Hitler's insane 'no retreat' orders. The corps attempted to relieve the units encircled in Budapest, which included two Waffen-SS cavalry divisions (see below). This Operation 'Spring Awakening' failed, as did an attempted breakout; the Hungarian capital fell to the Red Army on 13 February 1945, with the loss of 110,000 German prisoners.

In March 1945 the two cavalry brigades were officially redesignated 3rd & 4th Cavalry Divisions. To what extent this made any meaningful difference other than on paper is uncertain. Divisional organisation was reportedly as follows:

HQ

2x horse regiments

Artillery regiment

Anti-tank battalion

Signals battalion

Field replacement battalion

Engineer squadron

(plus supply, veterinary, etc. units)

The cavalry corps now conducted a fighting withdrawal westwards to Austria, trying – like so many German troops – to reach captivity at the hands of the Western Allies rather than the more vengeful Red Army. They succeeded; largely intact, they surrendered to the British 8th Army on 10 May 1945. At the time of its surrender the corps had a reported strength of 22,000 men and 16,000 horses. The horses were mostly turned over to local farmers by the Allies; the men were transported by rail to Württemberg and Hesse in the US Zone, where they were disbanded.



Troopers of the SS Cavalry Brigade near Byalistok in 1941; cf Plate C1 – the camouflaged field cap seems to have been introduced the following year. The mess tins are strapped to the M1934 'rider's pack', the right hand saddle bag. The *Reitergepäck* officially held the field cap, laced shoes, spare undershirt, socks, swimming shorts (for use when bathing the horse), shaving kit, washing kit, sewing kit, cleaning brush, tent cord, and a half iron ration of 500g of rusk and preserved meat. The left saddle bag was the 'horse's pack'

(Pferdegepäck). This had an external horseshoe case holding two horseshoes, nails, studs and calk; a tethering ring, and often 15 rifle cartridges. The main bag accommodated the mess tin, grooming brush, curry comb, blanket strap (for rigging the unfolded saddle blanket as a horse cover) and halter chain.

Initially, specialised leather accoutrements secured items to the saddle. These included the sabre frog behind the right leg, two types of rifle boots behind the left leg (see Plate A), and a case for the MG34 machine gun, also carried at rear left. (Signal)

THE WAFFEN-SS CAVALRY

As part of the *SS-Totenkopf* security forces, the *SS-Totenkopf Reiterstandarte* (SS Death's-Head Horse Regt) was raised from September 1939, specifically for security duties in Poland and initially with four squadrons. SS-Standartenführer Hermann Fegelein (see Plate C2) took command in November. By April 1940, designated 1st SS Death's-Head Horse Regt, it had eight sabre squadrons, 9th (replacement), 10th (heavy) and 11th (technical) squadrons, and a 12th horse battery with four 8cm guns. In May (by then 1,908 strong, in 14 squadrons) it was ordered divided into two regiments, with HQs at Warsaw and Lublin. The 1. & 2.SS-T Reiterstandarten each comprised 1st–4th sabre squadrons, 5th (heavy sqn) and 6th (horse bty), plus signals, engineer and motorcycle platoons. Organisational experiments in winter 1940 included re-amalgamation of the two regiments into a single unit of two 'half-regiments'.

On 21 February 1941 the 1.SS-T Reiterstandarte was retitled SS *Kavallerie Regiment 1*. On 21 March the unit was ordered divided once more, into SS Cavalry Regiments 1 & 2, each organised as follows:

HQ (plus signals, motorcycle & AT platoons)

1st, 2nd & 3rd Sqns

4th Sqn (MG)

5th Sqn (mortar & infantry gun)

6th Sqn (technical)

7th Sqn (bicycle recce)

8th Sqn (horse artillery bty)

The SS Cavalry Brigade

Immediately after the invasion of the USSR in June 1941, Himmler created a headquarters – 'Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS' – to command three brigades of former *Totenkopf* units on security and anti-partisan duties: the 1st & 2nd SS Bdes (Motorised), soon retitled SS Inf Bdes (Mot); and the SS Cav Bde, formally created under Fegelein's command in August 1941, and assigned to the rear areas of Army Group Centre. Sub-units were removed from the two regiments to form brigade-level artillery, pioneer, and bicycle reconnaissance units; a light AA battery was added, as well as various support and service units. Total strength was about 3,500 men, 2,900 horses and 375 vehicles.

In July–September 1941 the brigade was heavily and successfully engaged in the Pripet Marshes, and then around Gomel. Operations continued around Toropez, Yetkino and Rzhev; as winter closed in partisan activity increased. The Soviet counter-offensive of December found the brigade under 9th Army command, facing fresh, well-equipped and acclimatised Red Army troops rather than partisans. Fighting desperately alongside various Army divisions, the brigade was worn down by the end of March 1942 to a 700-man battlegroup, but

earned a good reputation among Army commanders. Most units were withdrawn to Poland in January–April 1942, and the last (Kampfgruppe Zehender) in August.

8th SS Cavalry Division ‘Florian Geyer’

The survivors formed a nucleus for a new *SS Kavallerie Division* from 21 June 1942, and a third horse regiment was added. The division returned to the front in August. During the rest of 1942 elements fought under both 9th and 2nd Panzer Armies. In reserve in April/May 1943, it then returned to anti-partisan duties between the Dniepr and the Pripet Marshes. In August 1943 a fourth horse regiment was added, of ethnic Germans recruited in Russia; the division’s eventual strength would be about 15,000 men. From July 1943 until early 1944 the division was transferred to Army Group South, fighting defensive battles under 8th and 1st Panzer Armies. It was designated *8.SS Kavallerie Division* in October 1943, when the horse regiments were renumbered, from 1–4 to 15–18. Transferred to Croatia in December, elements fought the Yugoslav partisans until March 1944, though a battlegroup served in Hungary under XXII Corps. On 12 March the 8th SS Cav Div was granted the honour title ‘Florian Geyer’ (after a 16th century hero of the Peasants’ War).

The division’s movements during 1944 are confused; elements fought under both Army Group Centre and Army Group South-East. Together with the 22nd SS Volunteer Cav Div, the ‘Florian Geyer’ was sent to Budapest in December as part of IX SS Corps. There it was encircled, and wiped out in February. Of the two SS cavalry divisions, only about 170 men escaped to the German lines.

Mounted units were never intended for use in urban fighting; their primary missions required a freewheeling style of manoeuvre over open terrain. Committing them to street fighting negated any advantage they had over infantry; and the sacrifice of the cavalry in Budapest denied the Wehrmacht their real potential for delaying actions during the later retreats. The comments of Gen. Harteneck, commander of the Army Cavalry Corps ordered to break through to Budapest, are telling:

‘While the Corps was still in the process of being transferred, we were again ordered to take up stationary positions, to our great disappointment. The cavalry divisions of the Waffen-SS were fighting in the metropolis of Budapest. Every cavalryman knew that nothing good could come of that, and, as it turned out, nothing did. The SS divisions were encircled My Cavalry Corps launched a night attack in an attempt to relieve them, but it was too late, and the Russian forces were too powerful. Although we managed to fight our way to the city limits, only 100 or so cavalrymen, under the command of the famous rider Staff Colonel von Mitzlaff, were able to break through to us. The subsequent battles, in the course of which my Corps was under the command of 6th SS Panzer Army, might have turned out quite differently had the two SS cavalry divisions been deployed to full advantage as cavalry formations, instead of being ordered to hold Budapest.’

22nd SS Volunteer Cavalry Division ‘Maria Theresia’

Raised in Hungary in spring/summer 1944, from ethnic German *Volksdeutsche* assembled around the nucleus of SS Cav Regt 17 from the 8th SS Cav Div, and commanded by the ‘Florian Geyer’ veteran

**Table 7: 8.SS
Kavallerie Division
‘Florian Geyer’,
1943–44**

HQ
SS Kav Regt 15 (ex-1)
SS Kav Regt 16 (ex-2)
SS Kav Regt 17* (ex-3)
SS Kav Regt 18 (ex-4)
SS Panzerjäger Abteilung 8
SS Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 8**
SS Artillerie Regt (mot) 8
SS Flak Abteilung 8
SS Nachrichten Abteilung (mot) 8
SS (Panzer) Aufklärungs Abteilung 8
SS Radfahr Aufklärungs Abteilung 8
SS Pionier Bataillon (mot) 8***
(plus supply, service units etc.)

Notes:

- * = detached 15 April 1943 as cadre 22.Freiw SS Kav Div
- ** = disbanded autumn 1944; 2 cos. passed to PzJägAbt.
- *** = detached 15 April 1943, later to 37.SS Kav Div

SS-Brigaf.August Zehender, this division was originally to be titled 'Ungarn'. Only SS Cav Regts 17 and 52 were complete before going into action at Debreczen; Cav Regt 53 joined in October 1944. Sent into Budapest in November 1944, it was wiped out in February 1945.

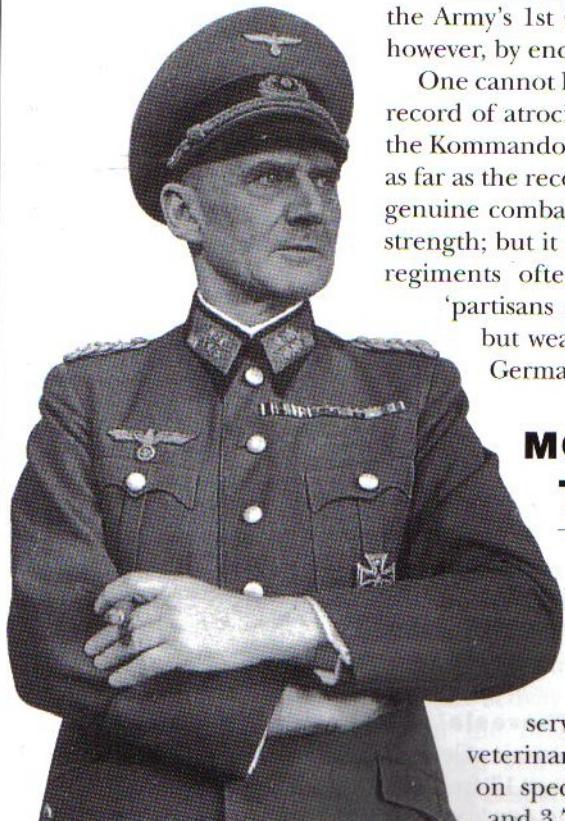
37th SS Volunteer Cavalry Division 'Lützow'

This was ordered raised in February 1945 at Pressburg under command of SS-Staf.Karl Gesele, incorporating survivors and depot personnel from the 8th and 22nd SS Cav Divs but mostly Hungarians, Romanians and other stragglers, in SS Cav Regts 92 & 93, and SS Arty, Engr and Field Replacement Bns numbered 37. The divisional HQ elements were sent into action alongside Army and Hungarian units in March/April 1945 north of Vienna, where the Soviet advance threatened a gap between 6th Panzer and 8th Armies. The remainder of the forming division moved west, surrendering to the US Army in Austria on 5 May.

* * *

Although committed to broadly the same range of missions as their Army counterparts, the Waffen-SS cavalry in Russia and the Balkans experimented with a variety of equipment mixes, adding armour and heavy weapons to their unit inventories as dictated by experience. They were issued basically identical equipment and weapons to the Army, but apparently benefited from Himmler's influence in enjoying priority of issue and resupply. It may have been this privileged access to materiel that allowed SS units to experiment; and they did create what can only be termed a 'heavy' cavalry division (see Table 7), with generous mechanised and armoured support to offset the weaknesses revealed in the Army's 1st Cav Div in 1941. This may have been a mixed blessing, however, by encouraging their misuse in positional fighting.

One cannot leave this subject without noting, however briefly, that the record of atrocities committed by the 'anti-partisan' Waffen-SS units of the Kommandostab RF-SS was unspeakable. We do not even have to look as far as the record of burnt villages and massacred civilians. Many of the genuine combats were hard-fought, against partisans in up to battalion strength; but it must be significant that the war diaries of the SS cavalry regiments often record operations in which several hundreds of 'partisans and criminals' are reported killed and taken prisoner, but weapons captured are numbered in only dozens, and total German casualties barely in double figures.



A general officer of the Veterinary Service, which was identified by carmine Waffenfarbe; the gold distinctions on service cap and tunic are the same as those of a line officer. He displays a long ribbon bar of World War I and interwar awards, and wears the Iron Cross 1st Class. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)

MOUNTING AND SUPPORTING THE GERMAN CAVALRY

Military horses required an extensive system of supply and maintenance to ensure combat readiness. Services included farriers, veterinarians, training bases for new troopers, and an extensive procurement and remount system. Approximately 13,000 men served in the cavalry support services, including 5,650 veterinarians; 700 medical officers; 250 line officers; 400 officers on special assignment; 8,100 NCOs and enlisted personnel; and 3,700 farriers.

Veterinarians

A single doctor was responsible for between 300 and 400 horses and mules. Efforts to provide veterinarians with motor transport paid dividends; supply columns stretching over many miles proved a challenge to vets using horse-drawn waggons, and their area of control increased markedly if motor transport was available. Service in mountain units such as those deployed in the Caucasus required a special breed of veterinarian, young and physically fit.

Soldiers assigned to mounted units during the early war years were generally well trained. As the war progressed and formerly motorised units began using horse transport, the incidence of death, disease and lameness due to poor horse care became endemic: 'In units that were supplied with horses as an emergency measure, this applying particularly to former motorised units, the incidence of sickness and injury among the horses was frightfully high. This was due to the lack of experienced personnel.'

The medical system for sick and injured animals paralleled that for the soldiers. Mobile hospitals near the front conducted a sort of triage, and those horses judged recoverable were sent to larger facilities further to the rear. Photographs show veterinary officers using X-rays, advanced tools and the latest treatment methods.

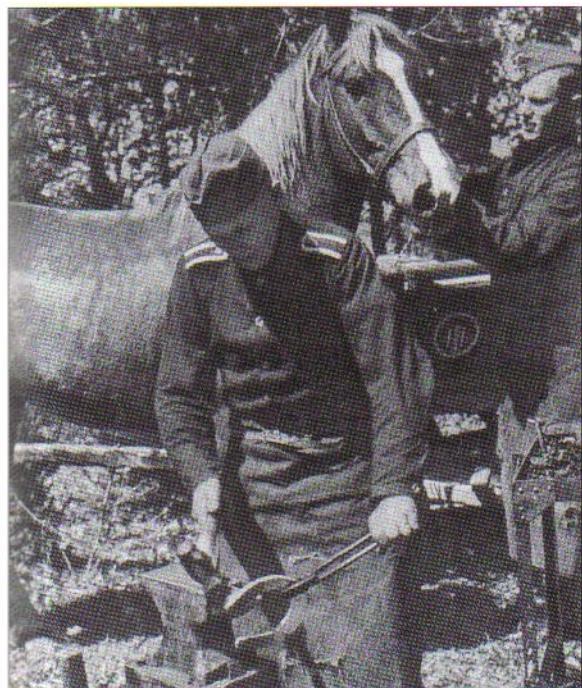
Farriers

The old adage, 'no hoof, no horse' is literally true. Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS farriers served as integral members of their units, on the scale of one per 250 horses. The farriers served under the auspices of the veterinary service, which was responsible for keeping them supplied with tools, nails, shoes, and associated equipment and supplies.

The farriers travelled in a self-contained workshop contained in an Hf1 waggon generally pulled by two horses; this accommodated all necessary tools and supplies, as well as the veterinarian chest and a reserve supply of medical items. A mobile smithy capable of loading on two pack horses was also available, consisting of a forge, coal, and a tool chest. This unit was provided on a scale of one per 50 horses. This was supplemented by the individual trooper's kit; each man carried a pre-fitted front and rear shoe for emergencies.

Front and rear shoes differed in type. Shoes came in 12 sizes and various types, depending on the unit and the terrain over which it was operating. For instance, mountain units with numerous pack animals used shoes with thread-in calks, blunt for summer and sharp for winter. Shoes were refitted or replaced, on average, every four to six weeks. Average shoe life was 600km (370 miles), though they could sometimes be repaired to last for another 300 kilometres. Shoes were not needed in areas of soft ground as long as the hooves of the animals were healthy and trimmed frequently.

Farriers were essential to the well-being of any mounted unit, and were provided on a scale of one per 250 animals. There were also mobile shoeing teams; their standard means of transportation was the Hf1 waggon. Most farriers were trained by the Army. Experience with former members of the civilian trade indicated that their unfamiliarity with the shoeing standards of the armed forces in fact made them less valuable than men trained 'from scratch'. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)





A field stable, probably in Russia.
The log construction gave good protection against the cold and rain, but the risk of fire was high – note the thatch on the front gable. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)

Procurement and remounts

An Inspectorate of Riding & Driving administered the remount system from 1938. This organisation came directly under control of OKH (Army High Command), and managed planning, procurement, training, and maintenance for all types of units using horses. Horses were classified by quality and type; a list dating from 1936 ranges from category RI (saddle horses for officers), KR (saddle horses for cavalry and infantry horse platoons) and R (saddle horses for other branches), through various draught categories.

The Inspectorate also undertook experiments in selective breeding; quality horses of the types needed were not available in sufficient numbers

for the Army's wartime requirements. Another department of the directorate was responsible for all aspects of horse-drawn vehicles. This included training schools and course requirements for drivers and handlers.

The remount office produced an annual plan which forecast the total numbers and types of horses required. The purchasing boards used this document as a guide during the procurement process. The requirement for procurement just before the war was approximately 15,000 per annum, purchased in Germany; the numbers required during the war were much larger. Purchase of horses was the responsibility of registration officers within the Inspectorate of Conscription & Recruiting. They oversaw the quotas for each community, and provided liaison between relevant uniformed and civilian officials at local level.

Procurement in occupied areas

Generally, procurement standards remained the same as those in Germany and Austria. Horses requisitioned for military use were usually taken without much consideration for the plight of the owner. An interesting exception to this policy was the practice of hiring a farmer along with his horse and cart, releasing them for planting and harvesting. It was appreciated that a farmer left potentially starving by the loss of his team became a willing recruit for the partisans. Letting him continue to farm resulted in fewer partisans, and more food for both the local populace and for Army consumption. Such sensible and humane practices were not the norm on the Russian Front, however.

The use of native Russian horses was not officially recommended. The Russian *panje* or draught horse was of small size and indeterminate breeding, often ill-fed and overworked. However, the *panje* horse was a survivor, and for lack of anything better German units in the field soon employed them in considerable numbers.

Training remounts

Fourteen remount depots were established. Horses procured for government use stayed at the depots for a year, and warmblood horses reached maturity at these facilities.

Each mounted regiment maintained a cadre of specialist personnel at its home depot, responsible for training new riders as casualty

GERMANY, 1937-39

- 1: Oberreiter, 3.Reiter Regiment; field manoeuvres, c1937
2: Wachtmeister, 10.Reiter Regiment; walking-out dress, 1939





FIELD UNIFORMS, 1940-41
1: Reiter, 1.Kavallerie Division; Russia, summer 1941
2: Rittmeister, 1.Kavallerie Division;
France, summer 1940
3: Obergefreiter, divisional reconnaissance
battalion; Russia, 1941

WAFFEN-SS CAVALRY, 1942-43

1: SS-Scharführer, SS Kavallerie Brigade;

Russia, 1942

2: SS-Brigadeführer Hermann Fegelein;

Russia, summer 1943



KAVALERIE KORPS 'HARTENECK',
RUSSIA, SUMMER 1944

1: Oberwachtmeister, 41.Reiter Regiment,

4.Kavallerie Brigade

2: Haflinger with M1933 pack saddle

3: Reiter, working dress



COSSACKS & KALMYKS, SOUTHERN RUSSIA, 1942

1: Zugführer, Kosaken Reiter Regiment 'Platov'; Army Group Centre, autumn 1942

2: Reiter, Kalmükenschwadron 66, 16.(mot) Infanterie Division; Kalmyk Steppe, November 1942



ITALIAN 8th ARMY, RUSSIA, AUGUST 1942
1: Tenente, 3a Reggimento 'Savoia Cavalleria'
2: Caporale, 5a Reggimento 'Lancieri di Novara'
(Both from 3a Divisione Celere 'Principe Amadeo Duca d'Aosta')



ROMANIAN & HUNGARIAN CAVALRY, RUSSIA, OCTOBER 1941

1: Fruntas, Romanian 3rd Calarasi Regt, 8th Cavalry Div; Nogai Steppe

2: Szazados, Hungarian 1st Cavalry Bde, Mobile Corps; Donetz River



GERMAN CAVALRY, 1944–45

- 1: Oberleutnant, I Btl, Kav Regt Mitte; Army Group Centre, Russia, winter 1943–44
- 2: SS-Sturmbannführer, 22.SS Freiw Kav Div 'Maria Theresia'; Budapest, winter 1944/45
- 3: Oberstleutnant, 5.Kav Regt 'Feldmarschall von Mackensen', 4. Kav Div; Austria, May 1945



replacements. Each regiment also maintained a remount facility where new mounts were broken in before transfer to the front. Procuring adequate numbers of remounts and draught animals was a constant challenge; it has been estimated that an average of about 700 horses were lost each day during the four-year Russian campaign.¹

While the cavalry maintained integral remount units, the training task for riders and horses in the mounted elements of infantry and artillery units, and for draught animals, fell to a rather unusual group. Due to a lack of qualified officers and NCOs in these units, German ladies who were well versed in riding and breaking horses, and ranging from teenagers to middle-aged, were employed for these tasks. These women often broke as many as ten horses each day, as well as riding a school horse or two daily into the bargain. (Frau Ingilt Guendel, the author's dressage instructor, served in such a capacity during the war, and still has her certification document.) The horsewomen wore the standard uniform tunic of their headquarters (without rank), riding breeches and boots.

Shelter and feeding

Adequate shelter and rations were critical for both draught and saddle horses. Horses were housed in any available stables, barns and sheds; and some photos show underground stable facilities being used on the Russian Front (an advantage to underground shelters was their greater resistance to shelling).

The fodder used by the German military varied. One popular type was supplied in cake form; a cake weighing about 5kg (11lbs) contained 2,000g of oats, 300g of yeast, 1,300g of potato parts, 750g of hay, and 650g of straw. The area of operation dictated the availability of various fodder types. Pasturage such as oats and native grasses were used if obtainable, as these were the most natural foods for horses.

Casualties

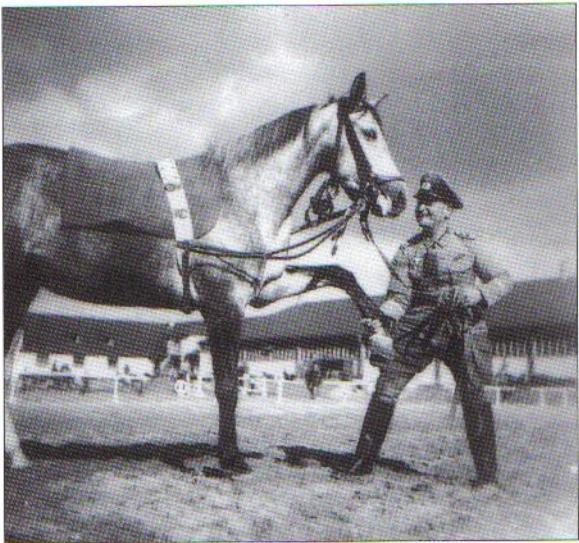
Strangely, statistics show that a horse's colour played a definite but as yet little understood part in its chances of maintaining good health on the Eastern Front. Brown horses sustained the most casualties, and white ('grey') the fewest. Battle casualties accounted for approximately 75 per cent of the total losses.

Of all the breeds used in Russia as saddle horses the best survivability among German native breeds was achieved by mixed bloods, which sustained a loss rate of 32.39 per cent. Thoroughbreds sustained the largest rate of casualties at 52 per cent. The lowest casualty rate among draught horses, commonly known as 'coldbloods', were the French breeds, at 30.1 per cent, with 54.2 per cent losses among German coldbloods.



Horse care and stable routine entailed an enormous amount of work on a daily basis. Stalls had to be mucked out, leatherwork and metal fittings oiled and polished. Horses required exercise, long hours of grooming, and cleaning out hooves with a hoof pick. Feeding and watering schedules were of great importance; and sick horses required even more attention. Here, troopers ready a horse for a trip to the watering trough; the man on the left wears the off-white linen jacket of stable undress. Farm boys were preferred inductees into the cavalry; it took less time to train a recruit who was already intimately familiar with horses than a city-bred soldier. In the field the daily care of the horse might mean that a trooper got two hours less sleep even than a front-line infantryman. (Bundesarchiv 146/200113/12017)

¹ The fate of the entire equine strength of the 17th Army, caught on the Crimean Peninsula by the final Soviet advance, was particularly cruel. To prevent their falling into enemy hands some 17,000 animals were killed and their bodies tossed into the sea.



A beautiful draught animal posing for the camera in the ring. The soldier is the unit's 'Spiess' or senior non-commissioned officer, identified by the two braid rings around his cuffs and the 'reporting book' tucked into the front of his tunic; under magnification, he seems to wear the 'Swedte Adler' tradition badge on his cap - see commentary to Plate H1.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)

In closing this chapter, some thoughts on European cavalry and mounted infantry standards of horse care and maintenance are appropriate; they are quoted from *Thoughts of A Soldier* by Gen.von Seekt, chief-of-staff of the Reichswehr in the 1920s:

'It is possible to mount hastily trained riders on half-trained horses, and a certain military use can be made of them; but they are not cavalry. Cavalry is not subject to improvisation, and the demands we place upon a mounted force can never be met by a cavalry militia.'

It is not easy for the average person today to understand the enormous effort involved in the proper care, feeding, training, and maintenance of military horses, both draught and saddle types. The improvisations demanded by the extreme conditions of the Russian campaign taxed the

German forces' equine procurement, training and maintenance system to the maximum. It is to the credit of the many dedicated men and women involved that the system continued to function and, indeed, grew in capacity even as the fortunes and resources of the Third Reich declined.

NON-GERMAN CAVALRY FORCES

Several other Axis nations provided contingents to assist the German forces on the Eastern Front, including cavalry units. These, and locally raised units, are briefly described below.

Romania

Romania provided the largest contingent of horsed cavalry. Six pre-war cavalry brigades were converted into divisions in March 1942, rising from three to four regiments each in 1944. Regiments were divided between two traditional types, *Rosiori* and *Calarasi*; by 1941 the difference was purely one of titles. A major modernisation programme begun in 1939 was not yet completed, though each cavalry division had one motorised cavalry regiment and some other mechanised elements by the start of Operation 'Barbarossa'. The cavalry brigades/divisions were designated 1st, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th; in 1941 each had an establishment of about 6,800 men, rising to 7,600 in 1942 and 8,780 in 1944. The 1st Cavalry Brigade/Division structure is typical:

11th Calarasi Regt, motorised (1941; horsed, 1944)

(replaced by Guard Calarasi Regt, 1942–43)

1st Rosiori Regt, horsed

2nd Rosiori Regt, horsed

(5th Rosiori Regt, horsed, added 1944)

1st Horse Artillery Regt – 75mm guns, 100mm howitzers

Reconnaissance squadron, mechanised (battalion, 1944)

Anti-tank company, motorised – 47mm (2 cos., 75mm, 1944)

Signals/engineer company, horsed.

The main units of the other formations in 1941–42 were:

5th Cav Bde – 6th Ros (mot), 7th Ros, 8th Ros; 2nd HArty

6th Cav Bde – 10th Ros (mot), 9th Ros, 5th Cal; 4th HArty

7th Cav Bde – 11th Ros (mot), 12th Ros, 9th Cal; 5th HArty

8th Cav Bde – 3rd Cal (mot), 4th Ros, 2nd Cal; 3rd HArty

9th Cav Bde – 5th Ros (mot), 3rd Ros, 13th Cal; 6th HArty

A typical mounted regiment of either Rosiori or Calarasi consisted of: *1st Sqn HQ*, signals platoon, engineer ptn (inc. flame-throwers); *4x sabre squadrons* (each 178 all ranks in 4x platoons; 13 LMGs); *1x heavy squadron* (16x 60mm mortars, 12x HMGs, 4x 75mm guns).

Apart from these formations, reconnaissance units for the infantry corps and divisions were provided by the 1st, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 10th and 12th Calarasi Regiments. Each divisional unit comprised a single squadron with a heavy machine gun section.

Operations In June/July 1941 forces including 7th Cav Bde and a Cavalry Corps (5th, 6th & 8th Cav Bdes) swiftly captured parts of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina which were claimed as Romanian territory. The government then responded to requests to support Germany's Army Group South in the southern Ukraine; in August, 1st Cav Bde was among units which reached the Black Sea coast. Hard fighting around Odessa in September/October cost 92,000 Romanian casualties; cavalry brigades involved were the 1st, 7th, and to a lesser extent the 9th.

The Cavalry Corps was among units subordinated to Gen.von Manstein's 11th Army attacking the Crimea. The Romanians were heavily counter-attacked on the Nogai Steppe, but held well. The 8th Cav Bde was sent into the Crimea in November 1941, and fought against the Red Army's Kerch landings in May 1942.

The Cavalry Corps (5th, 6th & 9th Divs) formed the right wing of the July 1942 advance to the Caucasus, clearing the coasts of the Black Sea and Sea of Azov. In November 1942, 1st and 7th Cav Divs were in the front line north of Stalingrad, and 5th and 8th south of the city, when the Soviet counter-offensive struck; all fought courageously. 1st Cav Div was surrounded in the Stalingrad pocket with German 6th Army; 7th was forced back to the Chir; 5th and 8th fought well in December, but all Romanian units were withdrawn at the end of the month.

Romanian troops stayed mainly on the defensive thereafter. The 6th Cav Div fought well on the Kerch Peninsula in December 1943, but another disaster in the Crimea in spring 1944 destroyed what was left of Romanian morale. The Soviet invasion of Romania in August 1944 led the country's rulers to change sides to the Allies. (See also commentary to Plate G1.)



Romanian cavalry in Bessarabia, July 1941, passing a civilian bus commandeered to supplement the Romanian Army's minimal motorised transport. Most of these troopers wear the light-weight M1930 summer tunic with woollen breeches, and the Dutch M1923/27 helmet adopted by Romania in 1939; note the M1890 cavalry sabres carried at the saddle – cf Plate G1.
(Courtesy Nigel Thomas)

Hungary

The pre-1939 cavalry consisted of two brigades, each of two regiments, their titles recalling Hungary's historic light cavalry traditions. Each regiment had 12 squadrons of 100 troopers each – or 300 in wartime. (This unwieldy size was due to the requirement that a cavalry squadron provide the same firepower as an infantry company, despite having to send every third or fourth man to the rear as horse-holders.) Mobilisation, as part of the elite Mobile Corps, produced the following brigade structure:

1st Cavalry Brigade

- 3rd Hussar Regt 'Count Nadasdy Ferenc'
- 4th Hussar Regt 'Count Hadik Andras'
- 1st Cavalry Artillery Group (part-motorised)
- 13th & 14th Bicycle Battalions

2nd Cavalry Brigade

- 1st Jasig-Kuman Regt 'Franz-Josef'
- 2nd Hussar Regt 'Prince Arpad'
- 2nd Cav Arty Gp (part-motorised)
- 15th & 16th Bicycle Bns

Slow reorganisation in 1942–43 saw an expansion in the artillery, engineer, signals, and reconnaissance elements and added anti-tank and anti-aircraft units. However, Hungary was always chronically short of modern equipment and vehicles, and the grudging nature of her alliance with Germany did not help.

Operations Hungary's war aim was to increase her territory, and in 1939–41 she occupied, with German support, parts of former Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. The need to guard her frontiers against hostile Romania allowed only a relatively small contingent for the invasion of the USSR. This included the Mobile Corps, with two motorised brigades but only the 1st Cavalry Brigade. In summer 1941 the mobile units spearheaded a remarkable 600-mile advance across Galicia and the Ukraine as part of Army Group South's 17th Army, reaching the Donets River in October; but the autumn mud cost the motorised units most of their vehicles, and the Mobile Corps was withdrawn and disbanded in November.

Reorganisation in October 1942 created a new 'Mobile Troops' branch which grouped armoured, motorised, cyclist and cavalry units. This included a 1st Cav Div, comprising 2nd, 3rd & 4th Cav Regts, and 1st Armd, 1st, 3rd and 55th Arty, 1st Recce and 4th Engineer Battalions. In spring 1944, 1st Cav Div was part of Hungarian 2nd Reserve Corps in the Pripet region, later making a fighting retreat to positions south-east of Warsaw (earning the honour title '1st Hussar Division').

In August 1944 Romania's defection left Hungary's southern frontier exposed. The 3rd Army, including a weak, scratched-together 'Cavalry Depot Division', was sent into western Transylvania to resist the Romanian and Soviet advance. After October Hitler installed a puppet

A Hungarian cavalry column on the march – cf Plate G2. The Hungarian Mobile Corps, including the 1st Cavalry Brigade, served with the Wehrmacht's 17th Army as part of Army Group South. These well-mounted heirs to the Imperial Hussar tradition distinguished themselves in the first deep advance of summer/autumn 1941, but were worn out by the time winter fell.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)



government, and some units continued to fight under German control. Budapest fell in February 1945, and after a failed German counter-attack at Lake Balaton in March the 3rd Army fell back westwards. The 1st Hussar Div withdrew via Theiss, and was lost near Budapest.

Italy

The Italian cavalry had a proud historical tradition but, like the rest of their army in 1940, they were badly handicapped by a shortage of modern vehicles, heavy weapons, and communications. In the field most formations had strengths well below their establishments, especially in motorised transport.

The cavalry branch of the Continental army¹ began their war with the following regiments, whose different designations were purely traditional:

Cav Regts: 1st 'Nizza', 2nd 'Piemonte Reale', 3rd 'Savoia', 4th 'Genova'. *Lancer Regts:* 5th 'Novara', 6th 'Aosta', 7th 'Milano', 9th 'Firenze', 10th 'Vittorio Emanuele II'. *Light Cav Regts:* 12th 'Saluzzo', 13th 'Monferatto', 14th 'Alessandro', 19th 'Guide', and 30th 'Palermo'.

Each regiment was divided into two 'groups of squadrons' of two squadrons each; a squadron had three troops, and each troop, four sections. The regiment also had a fifth, machine gun squadron. A typical regimental establishment was: 37 officers, 37 NCOs, 798 other ranks; 818 horses; 39x bicycles, 6x motorcycles, 16x trucks, 1x car; 12x MGs, 26x SMGs. The troopers were armed with sabres and carbines.

The higher formation for cavalry units was the *Divizione Celere* or 'Fast Division', of which there were three:

1a Divizione Celere 'Eugenio di Savoia':

12th 'Saluzzo' Lt Cav, 14th 'Alessandro' Lt Cav,
9th 'Firenze' Lancers (1x mot gp)

2a Divizione Celere 'Emanuele le Filiberto Testo di Ferro':

10th 'Vittorio Emanuele II' Lancers (1x mot gp)

3a Divizione Celere 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta':

3rd 'Savoia' Cav, 5th 'Novara' Lancers

A Fast Division's official establishment comprised 7,750 all ranks, 2,012 horses; 2,565x bicycles, 431x motorcycles, 641x other motor vehicles, 61x light tanks; 165x LMG, 78x HMG, 8x 20mm AA, 8x 47mm AT, and 24x field guns. Its main units were:

2x cavalry regts (horsed)

(each, 4x sabre squadrons + 1x MG sqn)

Bersaglieri regt (light inf, mot & bicycle)

(3x bns)

Artillery regt

Light tank group

Anti-tank company

Bersaglieri motorcycle company

Engineer company



This Type 23 pack saddle was designed specifically for service with the Gebirgsjäger mountain troops, who made great use of pack horses to carry a wide range of their equipment and supplies. There was also a light mountain cart with cover. It is easier for horses to carry heavy loads on their backs than to pull a load behind; the maximum load for a pack horse was 80kg (176lbs). See also Plate D2.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)

Operations For the June 1940 invasion of southern France, the 1st 'Nizza' Cav Regt was in 4th Army Reserve. During the first disastrous Greek campaign of winter 1940/41 the 6th 'Aosta' and 7th 'Milano' Lancer Regts served with the Coastal Group of the Epirus Sector. For the second offensive in April 1941 a single cavalry regiment was part of the mixed Centauro Group in Army Reserve. The simultaneous invasion of Yugoslavia saw the 1st, 2nd & 3rd Fast Divisions grouped in the Fast Corps.

The Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia (CSIR) which served under Army Group South from July 1941 initially comprised two nominally motorised infantry divisions and the *3a Divisione Celere Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta*. The cavalry component of this formation was the *3a Reggimento 'Savoya Cavalleria'* and the *5a Reggimento 'Lancieri di Novara'*. In March 1942 the CSIR was reinforced as the Italian 8th Army, but no further cavalry were sent to Russia. The Italian contingent advanced to the Don River that summer as part of Army Group B, and performed well, within the limitations of their equipment. The 3rd 'Savoy Dragoons' made a famous charge on 24 August 1942 (see commentary to Plate F1). The 8th Army was effectively destroyed on the Don north of Stalingrad by the Soviet counter-offensive that November, and withdrew from Russia soon afterwards.

Italian cavalry trooper of the 'Savoya Dragoons' – cf Plate F. The black cross of this unit can just be seen on the helmet front, and the M1940 tunic has wide-cut cavalry skirts. Note the black fur cover, apparently only at the rear of the saddle, and slit for the attachment of the sabre. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)

Other deployments recorded include: 1st Fast Div – 2nd Army Reserve, Croatia/Slovenia, 1943; 13th 'Monferatto' Lt Cav Regt – 1st Army; 2nd 'Piemonte Reale' & 4th 'Genova' Cav, 19th 'Guide' Lt Cav Regts – 2nd Army; 6th 'Aosta' & 7th 'Milano' Lancers – Supreme Command Albania; Light Cav Group – Sardinia.

It is reported that during the Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943, Italian cavalry offered stiff opposition to some of the scattered American paratroopers; but the Italian order of battle in Sicily does not reveal any cavalry regiments, and these troopers presumably belonged to some dispersed unit.

Cossacks

The Cossack communities or 'hosts', which had historically provided loyal light cavalry for the armies of the Tsars, had been persecuted by the Communists, and many welcomed the Germans as liberators. German units began recruiting them as auxiliaries early in the Russian campaign – initially in small groups and on an *ad hoc* local basis, but soon in significant numbers, which grew ever larger as the war progressed. German cavalry units operating against partisans were quick to add a *sotnia* of Cossacks to their strength. Their potential became clear as early as August 1941, when a complete Red Army unit of Cossacks under Maj. Kononov deserted to the Wehrmacht in Byelorussia. This was at first designated *Kosachen Abteilung 102*, then *Ost Kosachen Abt 600*, and finally as the 5th Don Cossack Regiment.

At first suspicious, Hitler officially authorised Cossack recruitment in April 1942. The most



important groups raised that year were the 'Lehmann' and 'Von Jungschulz' Regiments under Army Group South, and the 'Platov' and 'Von Wolff' Regiments under Army Group Centre. An example of a smaller and more obscure unit is provided by XL Panzer Corps. In summer 1942 this corps found itself awash with prisoners, who required a substantial armed escort to take them to the rear; and German soldiers could not be spared. Someone suggested that the Cossacks among the prisoners be provided with horses and set to guarding the prisoner column; and a certain Capt. Zagorodniy was placed in command. Zagorodniy returned in the autumn, and asked for another assignment. That the Cossacks had returned at all was a shock. However, they received formal training and official designation as 1/82 Cossack Sqn, serving faithfully until they were eventually destroyed – at St Lô, Normandy, in 1944!

In September 1942 Oberstleutnant Helmuth von Pannwitz, a German cavalry officer who had led a Cossack unit with some success alongside the Romanian cavalry, and who had a good relationship with the *ataman* of the Terek host, promoted the idea of forming a complete Cossack division. This was approved; he was appointed Commander of Cossack Units (with eventual promotion to lieutenant-general), and organised the evacuation from endangered areas of complete Cossack communities, to Poland and, eventually, to northern Italy.

The 1st Cossack Division was formally created on 4 August 1943 under Von Pannwitz's command, incorporating the Platov, Von Jungschultz, Lehman, Kononow and Von Wolff regiments. Many smaller units soon aggregated around these – though many others remained independent, still providing reconnaissance, security and escort services for the German units which had raised them.

The division was trained at Mlawa in Poland, organised in two brigades:

1st Cossack Bde:

1st Don, 4th Kuban, 2nd Siberian Regts; Caucasus Mtn Arty Bn

2nd Cossack Bde:

3rd Kuban, 5th Don, 6th Terek Regts; Caucasus Mtn Arty Bn

Each horse regiment had six squadrons, each divided into 12-man *Gruppen*. Each brigade also had a 'heavy' squadron with 4x 81mm mortars and 4x machine guns. The division boasted an anti-tank squadron with 5x 5.0cm guns. German weapons and uniforms were issued as well as captured Russian materiel; some Cossacks wore their traditional costumes dating back to Imperial days.

Mlawa was a large former Polish Army facility providing ample room for the 10,000–15,000 men and horses who passed through it. Divisional



The Germans recruited Cossacks in large numbers, at first in small independent local squadrons attached as auxiliaries, but later in regiments, brigades, and finally in two divisions. They were largely employed on anti-partisan duties in Russia and the Balkans, though some reached as far afield as France. This close-up shows the traditional shaska sabre, of Caucasian origin, and a slung Russian Mosin-Nagant rifle. Under magnification he can be seen to wear a death's-head sleeve patch. The uniforms, insignia and equipment of Cossack units in German service were often motley in the extreme, although several systems of rank and 'host' insignia have been published. (Bundesarchiv 146/99/95/1817 & 146/78/41/6)



A Cossack officer and troopers in service with Army Group South. These men seem to wear German insignia, and the officer at left has a *bashlyk* slung behind the shoulders of his German service tunic – cf Plate E1. (Sipho)

from their homelands. The Cossacks were apparently effective, and at the end of 1943 the 2nd Bde was transferred as the nucleus for a 2nd Cossack Division. Together with additional corps troops, the two then formed XIV Cossack Corps. During 1944 several infantry units were raised within the corps. The Cossacks finally got their chance to fight the Red Army when Soviet and Bulgarian forces advanced into Yugoslavia.

At the end of 1944, with a 3rd Division in the process of forming, the corps was redesignated XV SS Cossack Cavalry Corps; but the re-assignment from Army to Waffen-SS control was administrative only – the units kept their old titles and uniforms.

Notoriously, the fate of the Cossacks fighting with the German forces was to be grim. The 1st Cossack Division surrendered to the British Army on 9 May 1945 near Lienz, Austria. However, the Allies had agreed to hand over Soviet citizens captured in German uniform to the USSR; and the thousands of British POWs liberated from German camps but still held by the Red Army were a powerful bargaining chip. The British handed the Cossacks over to the vengeful Soviets; most were sentenced to hard labour in Siberia, and their leaders were executed – as was Gen.von Pannwitz, who freely chose to share his men's fate.

Kalmyks

The Kalmyks are a nomadic people of Asiatic descent, practising a kind of Buddhism, whose ancestral homeland on the open steppes was bordered by the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. Like the Cossacks, they had good reason to resent their Communist overlords (though like the Cossacks again, some fought on either side). When the Wehrmacht reached their capital of Elista in 1942 they recruited Kalmyks as scouts and partisan raiders; perhaps surprisingly, they did not treat the nomads as a subject people, but as irregular allies.

support units were created; a Volunteer Training and Replacement Regt with HQ at Mochovo ran a school for Cossack boys and an officer training course; there was even a newspaper. The division was predominantly Russian, and used that language, though technicians such as farriers and veterinarians were mostly German. Each regiment of about 2,000 men had some 160 German staff.

In September 1943 the division was transferred to Croatia to fight Tito's partisans; it was now German policy to employ *Osttruppen* on fronts far

The first official Kalmyk unit was *Abwehrtruppe 103*, formed in autumn 1942 to perform patrolling and security functions under 6th Army headquarters. In September the commander of 16th Motorised Inf Div authorised the raising of two Kalmyk squadrons to operate along the division's extended rear lines. By the following summer seven Kalmyk units were in service. Collectively the force was known variously as *Kalmucken Verband Dr Doll* (after the German intelligence official who raised it), the Kalmyk Legion, and finally the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps (KKK). The force withdrew westwards with the German Army in 1943, still employed on rear-area security duties. Eventually it had a headquarters and 24 squadrons organised in four Abteilungen; each of these battalions had one elite *Jagdschwadron* ('hunting squadron'). In August 1943, I Abteilung grouped 1st, 4th, 7th, 8th & 18th Sqns; II Abt, 5th, 6th, 12th, 20th & 23rd; III Abt, 3rd, 14th, 17th, 21st & 25th; and IV Abt, 2nd, 13th, 19th, 22nd & 24th Squadrons. (The 9th, 10th, 11th, 15th & 16th Sqns remained behind to carry out partisan warfare against the Red Army on the Kalmyk Steppe.) Most KKK officers and NCOs were ex-Red Army men, and there was only a minimal German liaison staff.

Retreating into Poland, in 1945 the Kalmyks were the only non-Russians to join Gen. Vlasov's KONR. They paid a high price; after the war Stalin transported their entire ethnic community into exile far from their ancestral lands.



Portrait of a pre-war cavalry trooper in his walking-out dress.
The visored service dress cap could be worn by all enlisted ranks with this uniform, but around the barracks only senior NCOs were permitted it. The Waffenrock – or 'Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Tunic', as it was nicknamed – is easily identifiable by the lack of breast pockets: cf Plate A2. The film used here has darkened the cavalry's golden-yellow collar patch backing and the piping on cap and tunic.
(Paul L.Johnson Collection)

FURTHER READING

English language works on Axis cavalry are limited; greater scope for research exists if German language publications are included, and the author suggests the following:

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 Richter, Klaus, *Weapons & Equipment of the German Cavalry 1935–45*, (Atglen, PA, 1995)
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 Rottman, Gordon, *German Combat Equipments 1939–45*, Men-at-Arms 234 (Osprey, London, 1991)
 Yerger, Mark C., *Riding East: the SS Cavalry Brigade in Poland and Russia 1939–42*, (Atglen, PA, 1996)

THE PLATES

Additional material by Martin Windrow

A: GERMANY, 1937-39

A1: Oberreiter, 3.Reiter Regiment; field manoeuvres, c1937

The M1918 helmet was still in use by most cavalry units, though soon to be replaced with the standard M1935. The national and Army decals on right and left sides are here obscured by the band of red cloth buckled to the helmet for quick identification of forces during manoeuvres. His standard issue M1936 tunic in field grey has a dark green 'badge cloth' collar. Matching riding breeches with grey leather reinforcement to the inside legs and seat are worn with riding boots with buckled-on steel spurs; privately purchased black gloves are tucked into his belt. Pre-war collar patches displayed two 'lights' in arm-of-service colour – here cavalry golden-yellow; the dark green shoulder straps are piped yellow, and bear a yellow embroidered regimental number. (The infantry horse platoons wore white *Waffenfarbe*, and were nicknamed 'White Riders'.) Senior private's rank is shown by the silver-grey four-point star on a dark green disc on the left upper arm. Obscured here is the national eagle and swastika badge, in white on dark green backing, on the right breast.

His belt is supported by Y-shaped 'cavalry' braces, lacking the broad shoulder sections and the pack attachment D-rings behind the shoulders found on infantry equivalents. Two sets of triple M1911 rifle cartridge pouches, and the bayonet hidden here on his right side, are standard issue; his bread bag and water canteen are also obscured behind his right hip. A canvas strap supports his M1938 gasmask canister high behind his right arm. The Kar 98k rifle is carried in a leather 'boot' strapped to the saddle behind his left leg, and supported by a strap fastened by loops and studs to the rear of his belt. The sabre is attached by a buckled frog to the saddle behind his right leg (*inset*); the fist strap illustrated is in the colours of the 2nd Sqn of a regiment. Officers and senior NCOs, who did not carry rifles, attached the sabre behind the left leg instead.

His mount is a Hanoverian, typically of 15.3-16 hands and solidly coloured. Over the grey blanket ('*Woilach*') is strapped the M1925 saddle, with the early pattern corded girth and – as seen in pre-war photos – a martingale. Note the double

Front of a yellow-piped officer's service cap – Dienstmütze – bearing between the national eagle and wreathed cockade the silver Brunswick death's-head tradition badge. In honour of the old Brunswick Hussars, it was awarded in 1921 to the 4th Sqn of 13.Reiter Regiment, and in 1939 to the whole of II Abteilung, 13.Kavallerie Regiment. In 1943 it was taken over by Kavallerie Regiment Sud; and later by 41.Reiter Regiment in 4.Kavallerie Brigade/Division.

The Prussian death's-head of the old Leib Husaren was worn from 1921 by the 1st and 2nd Sqns of 5.Reiter Regiment, and from 1933 by the regimental staff and the whole of I Abteilung (except 3rd Sqn) of 5.Kavallerie Regiment. In 1943 it was taken over by Kavallerie Regiment Nord, later retitled 5.Kavallerie Regiment 'Feldmarschall von Mackensen' – see Plate H3. (IWM UNI20-02)

reins and bits of the combination watering bridle and riding halter, and the characteristic S-shaped bars. The trooper's camouflaged *Zeltbahn* tent-quarter is here rolled and strapped round the off-side M1934 saddle bag; it was officially added to the *Hintergepäck* behind the saddle, where three straps attach his neatly folded greatcoat, over a blanket, over a large folded forage sack and collapsible canvas bucket. The stowage of the *Packtaschen* 34 saddle bags is listed in the caption on page 20.

A2: Wachtmeister, 10.Reiter Regiment; walking-out dress, 1939

This immaculate senior NCO, of the cavalry rank equivalent to Feldwebel in other arms of service, wears the service dress cap and private purchase *Waffenrock* tunic available to all enlisted ranks for walking-out, with the stone grey trousers and laced black shoes which completed that uniform. The cap, tunic and trousers are all piped in cavalry yellow, which also appears as backing to the silver bars of the collar and cuff lace; note that on the *Waffenrock* the NCO's silver *Tresse* braid follows the upper rather than the lower edge of the collar, and appears on the cuffs. The yellow-piped shoulder straps also bear *Tresse*, and the unit number – for senior NCOs, in pin-on white metal form. The sabre is attached to an internal belt by a hanger passing under the tunic; the fist strap had a silver-flecked dark green 'crown' for all senior NCO ranks (Unteroffizier mit Portepee) irrespective of unit. This sergeant-major also displays the marksmanship lanyard on the right shoulder, worn by enlisted ranks in various achievement grades; and the regimental standard bearer's armshield on the right sleeve – a photo also shows this being worn by a pre-war Wachtmeister on field uniform.



B: FIELD UNIFORMS, 1940-41

B1: Reiter, 1.Kavallerie Division; Army Group Centre, Russia, summer 1941

This trooper represents in most respects the appearance of the cavalryman on campaign in Poland, France and Russia in 1939-41. He holds his field grey-painted M1935 helmet. His tunic is the M1940, with field grey collar and universal collar lace without arm-of-service distinctions. For security, the regimental number is no longer worn on the yellow-piped shoulder straps. Wearing the collar open and the sleeves rolled in summer was tolerated in the field; and photographs often show the equipment Y-straps discarded. The riding boots, made of thinner leather and with a more pointed toe than the infantry marching boots, were not normally hob-nailed.

His mount is a Trakehner, typically of about 16-16.2 hands. The equipment differs from Plate A1 mainly in the absence of the rifle boot and sabre – the rifle was now carried slung. (Sources state that the sabre was withdrawn after the 1939 Polish campaign; however, a photo showing a mounted reconnaissance troop carrying sabres before Moscow in winter 1941 has been sent to the author by Herr Heinrich Deckert, a member of the troop, who writes that they shipped their sabres home just after the photo was taken.) Note the addition of a pair of rear saddle bags, the M1940 *Packtaschen neuer Art*. Like the M1934, these came in a differing pair: the right or 'rider's pack' was smaller than the left or 'horse pack'. In the field, photographs often show the two pairs of bags worn together; and kit stowage owed more to practical convenience than regulations. As here, the mess tin was often strapped outside the saddle bag; the gasmask canister and its attached cape are stowed between the saddle bags, the rolled *Zeltbahn* in front of them. The water canteen, canvas bucket, and (here) an entrenching tool are often seen attached at various points around the saddle. Note that the martingale has now been discarded.

B2: Rittmeister, 1.Kavallerie Division; France, summer 1940

This captain commanding a squadron wears the 'old style officer's field cap', with a small, soft crown, flexible peak, and no chin cords. Photos of pre- and early-war cavalry officers confirm a little-known (and often disregarded) regulation forbidding the display of the national eagle badge on the crown; the usual lower badge is in flat-woven BeVo form. His private purchase field grey tunic, with dark green collar and deep turned-back cuffs, is worn with leather-reinforced stone grey breeches and fine quality riding boots. His branch is shown by the yellow 'lights' on the collar lace and the underlay to the silver cord shoulder straps, his rank by the two gold 'pips' on the latter. This officer wears the usual field belt with a holstered P08 pistol and one of several variants of the M1934 'report' (map) case; his binocular case is pushed round to the back.

The gilt horseman badge of the National Association for the Breeding & Testing of German Warmbloods is worn on the left breast pocket. During the 1930s cavalry and horse artillery officers of the rank of Rittmeister or Hauptmann were required to pass this organisation's theoretical and practical examinations. Enlisted men of mounted branches seem to have regarded it as mildly demeaning to display a civilian endorsement of the skills which were integral to their military training; it is usually seen worn by non-cavalrymen.

B3: Obergefreiter, divisional reconnaissance battalion; Russia, 1941

The Aufklärungs Abteilungen of infantry divisions were versatile mixed battalions, which saw a great deal of combat; their mobility allowed their deployment as quick-reaction units, but the troopers normally fought on foot. This junior NCO wears the M1938 field cap, with a soutache of yellow *Waffenfarbe* around the national cockade; the whole of the reconnaissance battalion retained the cavalry arm-of-service colour. His rank is marked by the double chevron on the left sleeve of his M1936 tunic. The breeches, of early wartime manufacture, are field grey; note that the leather reinforcement was variously made of calf- or goatskin and varied in colour. For foot combat he has removed his spurs; and wears his right hand M1934 'rider's' saddle bag fitted with shoulder straps as a backpack, with the *Zeltbahn* and mess tin attached. His personal equipment otherwise differs from that of an infantryman only in having a hilt strap on the bayonet frog.

C: WAFFEN-SS CAVALRY, 1942-43

C1: SS-Scharführer, SS Kavallerie Brigade; Russia, 1942

Signalling his patrolling platoon to halt, this sergeant-major wears Waffen-SS rank insignia on his left collar patch; the right patch bears SS runes. Silver Tresse edging the dark green collar identifies senior NCO rank. His command status is also indicated by his binoculars and map case, and his MP40 sub-machine gun; this was habitually worn slung on the chest, and he has a single set of black leather triple magazine pouches on the right side of his belt. At this date the Waffen-SS were the only German troops issued with camouflage-printed clothing as standard; interestingly, photos suggest that in the SS cavalry this included a peaked field cap well before the general introduction of the similar field grey wool M1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze*, so it was presumably modelled on the Army's mountain cap. This, and the cover for the helmet just visible slung from the saddle behind his right hip, are in so-called 'plane tree' pattern. His smock is in 'palm tree' pattern, seen in many photos of SS cavalry; the 'frill' at the cuffs and the lower skirt are tucked up inside the elastication at wrist and waist.

His Hanoverian mount wears a new type of strapped forage sack round its neck; and only the M1940 saddle bags are worn here.

C2: SS-Brigadeführer & Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Hermann Fegelein, SS Kavallerie Division; Russia, summer 1943

Fegelein, a keen horseman, was appointed commander of the SS main riding school and competed in many equestrian events. He commanded the 1.SS-Totenkopf Reiterstandarte in Poland during 1940, and the SS Kavallerie Brigade from August 1941. He remained in command, apart from short absences, until November 1943. He then relinquished command of 8.SS Kavallerie Division to join Hitler's staff as Himmler's liaison officer. He married Eva Braun's sister Gretl in June 1944; but this family connection did not save him from a firing squad in Berlin on 29 April 1945, after Hitler discovered Himmler's attempted contacts with the Allies.

General Fegelein wears the lightweight white linen summer tunic popular with some commanders. This bears no collar patches, but simply the shoulder straps of his rank on Waffen-SS general officers' light grey underlay. The only other distinction worn is his Knights Cross with Oakleaves

(2 March & 21 December 1942). Fegelein wears an officer's service dress cap – *Dienstmütze* – with the cords removed, in the manner of the 'old style officer's field cap', retaining the cavalry yellow piping and with a machine-woven Army national eagle badge on the crown.

D: KAVALLERIE KORPS 'HARTENECK', RUSSIA, SUMMER 1944

D1: Oberwachtmeister, 41.Reiter Regiment, 4.Kavallerie Brigade

This sergeant-major carries typical items for a junior leader – the map case; the flashlight, usually fixed to the tunic by a buttoning tab; and the M1928 signal flare pistol. His personal weapon is the innovative MP43/StG44 assault rifle in 7.92mm *kurz*, issued to at least two of the reconstituted cavalry regiments: the 41st, ex-Kav Regt Sud, and the 5th, ex-Kav Regt Nord. A photo shows men of the 41st carrying it slung muzzle-down; and also wearing this M1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze* field cap. His M1943 economy model tunic has unpleated pockets, and field grey shoulder straps with subdued grey *Tresse*; note that late-manufacture breeches had cloth doubling rather than leather reinforcement. A typical set of awards for this rank and period would include at least the General Assault Badge, a Wound Badge, and the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class. At some stage in 1944 this regiment adopted the Brunswick death's-head tradition badge formerly worn by Kav Regt Sud.

D2: Pack horse with 1933 pack saddle

In mounted units the heavy weapons, ammunition, radios, etc. were typically carried on pack horses, which were much more mobile across country than the horse-drawn commissariat wagons. Pack horses were assigned down to section level, two of the three sections of a mounted troop each having one ammunition horse and handler. This chestnut is a Haflinger, about 14 hands high; they made excellent pack animals, but in Russia by 1944 the Wehrmacht took what it could get. There were two models of pack saddle; that illustrated is the M1933 general issue type.

D3: Reiter, working dress

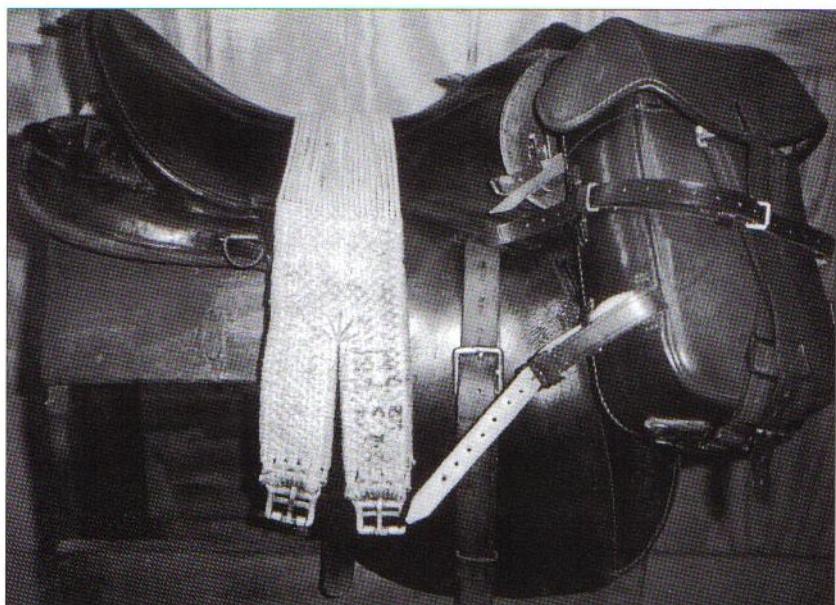
Interestingly, many photos show men of the reconstituted cavalry units still wearing the sidecap rather than the M1943 visored field cap, right up to the end of the war; in this case it is the M1942 *Feldmütze*, with a divided, two-button turn-up curtain. Because of this feature the insignia were made as a one-piece badge on a green backing, and no yellow soutache could be fitted. His shirt is the standard field grey 'aertex' type with attached collar, half-buttoning front, pleated pockets, but no insignia or provision for shoulder straps.

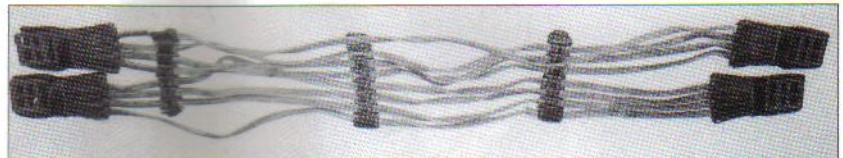
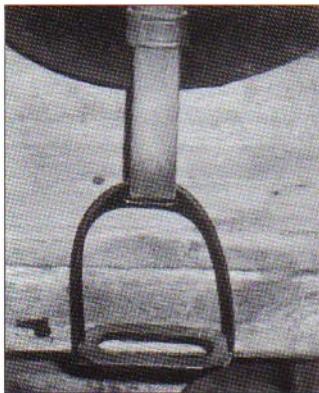
E: COSSACKS AND KALMYKS, SOUTHERN RUSSIA, 1942

E1: Zugführer, Kosaken Reiter Regiment 'Platov'; Army Group Centre, autumn 1942

This platoon commander of one of the first sizeable Cossack units raised for German service wears a German M1936 enlisted man's tunic without national insignia. His rank is indicated by the system authorised for this regiment as early as June 1942 (it pre-dated the variously coloured armshields for the 'hosts'). This most junior commissioned rank wore red collar patches edged all round with silver *Tresse*, and the white officer's shoulder straps had a single transverse bar of *Tresse*. (Enlisted ranks wore plain red patches and shoulder straps, with various *Tresse* edgings and bars for NCOs.) The white St Andrew's Cross on a green oval worn on his black lambswool *papasha* cap is also a very early badge; the crown of the cap would be in red with a silver cross for a Don Cossack – the 5cm-broad scarlet stripes on his dark blue Russian breeches identify a member of the Don *voisko* or 'host'. His riding boots are of a high pre-war Russian type; as an officer he wears spurs – other Cossack ranks did not, since their horsemanship skills allowed them to control their mounts by grip and shifting their weight, and with the plaited *nagaika* quirt. Behind his shoulders, by a cord round the neck, he wears the Russian cold weather hood or *bashlyk*, here a former Red Army example in khaki with red tape.

The M1925 saddle and M1934 front saddle packs. This universally issued saddle was a modified dressage/cross-country design having a wooden tree strengthened with metal at stress points; metal buckles on front and rear allowed the attachment of various equipment items. The saddle seat is deep, providing security under all conditions – it was even more secure when saddlebags and equipment were closely lodged against the rider's body, as was the case in the field. The M1925 was issued in five different sizes, allowing its use on all sizes of horses. The girth is the later second type, with thick webbing ends. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)





LEFT The issue stirrup. The slotted iron dissipated dirt and lessened the weight. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)

ABOVE There were two slightly differing types of issue girths, both of the 'string' type composed of several cords of cloth material, and this first type with leather reinforcements. Both used cordage of a dark tan to cream colour. This first pattern example has eight cords of tan cloth held in place by three brown leather reinforcements sewn at key points, with four metal buckles on brown leather backings at the ends. (Author's collection)



ABOVE The M1940 rear saddlebags were issued in asymmetric pairs attached by an additional leather piece with a metal latch arrangement. They never entirely replaced the earlier M1934 front saddle packs on active service, and photographs quite often show the use of both styles on one horse. (Paul L.Johnson Collection)

edging. His M1932 Red Army mounted officer's 'Sam Browne' style belt is worn with both braces, the left hand brace with a whistle pocket. Typically of all Cossack ranks, a cross belt supports the traditional *shashka* sabre – here a finely decorated example – with the cutting edge to the rear.

His horse is a Karabakh, standing only about 14.2 hands. The Cossacks used a motley mixture of their own tack and German and Red Army equipment, as preferred and available. Their own bridles had only a single snaffle, and their saddles were high, with a cushion over the wooden frame which placed the rider high over the centre of gravity of the horse. German saddle bags – like this M1940 set – were often issued.

**E2: Reiter, Kalmükkenschwadron 66,
16.(mot) Infanterie Division; Kalmyk Steppe,
November 1942**

It was hardly surprising that Generalleutnant Heinrich should seek to raise local auxiliaries to patrol his division's lines of supply and communication. From mid-September 1942 the 16th (Motorised) had to cover a gap of 350 square miles between 1st and 4th Panzer Armies on the plains south of Stalingrad. This irregular cavalryman wears the traditional wolf fur cap of his people, a ragged sheepskin *poloshubok* coat, Red Army breeches and boots, and fur insulation strips

inside the latter. He has been issued with a captured Red Army PPSh41 sub-machine gun, waist belt and magazine pouch; and also carries a Red Army M1927 sabre, slung on a cross belt with the cutting edge to the rear in the Russian style. As essentially a 'free corps' rather than members of the Wehrmacht the Kalmyks wore even more motley outfits than the Cossacks, and did not receive German insignia. Two types of national armshield have been illustrated, but there seems to be no evidence of their being worn in the field.

F: ITALIAN 8TH ARMY, RUSSIA, AUGUST 1942

**F1: Tenente, 3a Reggimento 'Savoia Cavalleria',
3a Divisione Celere 'Principe Amadeo Duca
d'Aosta'**

On 24 August 1942 Col.Bettoni's regiment – a unit of Army Group B – was sent forward with the Novara Lancers to counter-attack a Soviet bridgehead over the Don River. They engaged a force of some 2,000 infantry with numerous support weapons, holding a village variously reported and spelled as 'Ischbuchenskiy' or 'Tchebarevskiy'. The 2nd Sqn were led by Capt.De Leone in a courageous mounted charge with sabres and hand grenades, taking the enemy in the left flank while the rest of the regiment put in a dismounted attack. The charge was successful, if costly, and De Leone was among the fallen; the squadron was then led in a second charge back along the enemy line by Maj.Mansuardi. This may have been the last mounted sabre charge by any formed Western cavalry unit in history.

The M1933 helmet, painted grey-green, bears the black painted cross peculiar to this dragoon regiment; another unit distinction was the scarlet tie. The tunic collar bears the regiment's black triple 'flames', and the five-point silver national star; after this action the 'flames' were piped with scarlet in commemoration of the charge. On each cuff are the first lieutenant's rank insignia, a 'curl' and two bars of gold wire on grey-green backing. All officers' breeches had these black stripes and piping. He wears privately purchased white string and brown leather riding gloves. The 'Sam Browne' belt supports a holstered Beretta M1934 pistol, and map case and binoculars are slung on his far side. He is armed with two captured Russian weapons which were popular in this unit: a slung PPSh41 sub-machine gun with its big 70-round drum magazine; and on his saddle, a Cossack *shashka*, fitted with the black Italian fist strap.



Col. Carlo Pagliano, commander of the Italian 'Novara' Lancers' regiment in Russia, 1941; cf Plate F. He wears the M1933 helmet, a coarse enlisted men's quality M1940 tunic, and the regiment's triple white 'flames' collar insignia, and on his left breast the eagle badge of War Academy graduates. (Friedrich Herrmann Memorial Collection)

His horse is a German Hanoverian; Italian officers' mounts, unlike those of their men, did not have the manes shaved and tails docked. All ranks might use a black fur saddle cover, that of officers being of shorter and neater appearance.

F2: Caporale, 5a Reggimento 'Lancieri di Novara', 3a Divisione Celere 'Principe Amadeo Duca d'Aosta'

The division's two mounted regiments were grouped together in the Raggruppamento a Cavallo for these actions, during which the Novara Lancers successfully penetrated some kilometres into the Soviet positions on 23 August. By far the majority of fighting was done on foot, and this trooper is advancing to the attack having passed his mount to a horseholder. His M1933 helmet has the badge of the Lancer units stencilled in black silhouette. The M1940 tunic, and breeches with doubled reinforcement to the legs and seat, are of a darker, coarser grey-green material than the officer's uniform. The regimental collar 'flames' are white. His rank is indicated by one wide above one narrow red chevrons on grey-green backing on both upper sleeves. Tucked into the integral cloth belt of his tunic is his field cap, the *bustina*, which has a black embroidered Lancer badge on the front flap. Instead of riding boots, enlisted ranks wore laced ankle boots with spurs, and

these long strapped gaiters. His stiff grey-green leather two-pouch bandolier was standard issue to cavalry and artillery units; his weapon is the Carcano M1891/38 carbine with folding bayonet, and he also holds a red-painted hand grenade. The issue sabre was the M1871.

Enlisted ranks' tack differed from the German models. Oddly, troopers were not issued with saddle bags, strapping all their gear to the front and rear of the saddle. The harness featured a brown leather neck strap with metal attachments; this allowed the middle trooper in a column of threes to secure his two flankers' horses to his own when they dismounted to fight on foot, and to take them to the rear. Their stirrup irons also had a unique extra down-folding 'foot' to facilitate mounting by a heavily laden soldier.

G: ROMANIAN AND HUNGARIAN CAVALRY, RUSSIA, OCTOBER 1941

G1: Fruntas, Romanian 3rd Calarasi Regiment, 8th Cavalry Brigade; Nogai Steppe

In late September/early October the Cavalry Corps of the Romanian 3rd Army saw hard but successful fighting on the Nogai Steppe north of the Crimea, while covering the rear of Von Manstein's 11th Army as it advanced into the peninsula. This senior private's rank is marked by the yellow-on-khaki braid loop on the shoulder straps of the light khaki summer version of the M1939 tunic. The winter weight khaki wool breeches were worn with this – lighter breeches would have been too flimsy to stand the hard wear of riding. Conscript soldiers below the rank of sergeant-major did not wear the bastion-shaped collar patches (crimson for cavalry). The Dutch helmet was adopted by the Romanian Army in 1939; pre-war examples had the embossed crowned double-C monogram of King Carol on an oval front plate. His riding boots have the traditional clip-on brass rosettes, though these were usually removed in the field. An olive canvas satchel for the M1932 or M1939 gasmask is slung over his right shoulder, and his ZB24 rifle – essentially a licence-built 7.92mm Mauser – over his left shoulder. Brown leather belt and Y-straps support his ammunition pouches, entrenching tool, and bayonet.

The horse is a Furioso, standing about 16 hands. The tack is conventional; the straight 'thrusting' sabre is attached to the saddle behind the left leg, and saddle bags are carried instead of a pack. Some photos show a large, 'doughnut'-shaped forage net slung behind the right leg.

G2: Szazados, Hungarian 1st Cavalry Brigade, Mobile Corps; Donetz River

Care had to be taken to keep Hungarian and Romanian troops apart, since the two countries were bitterly hostile. The Hungarian cavalry were heirs to a proud Austro-Hungarian imperial tradition. This officer's rank of captain is displayed on the front of his elegant field cap and his collar patches by three gold laces and stars; his branch, by the flashes of hussar light blue – which changed to dark blue for all 'mobile' troops from October 1942. A khaki uniform had been adopted in 1922; over the field version (which lacks the service uniform's elaborate gold lacing around the collar patches) this officer wears a private purchase double-breasted trench coat with a deep cased hood. On his belt is a holstered 9mm M1937 semi-automatic pistol. Hidden here by his coat, his riding boots would have 'hussar' tops – shaped to a notch at the front, edged with gold braid, and with brass frontal rosettes.

H: GERMAN CAVALRY, 1944-45

H1: Oberleutnant, I Bataillon, Kavallerie Regiment Mitte; Army Group Centre, Russia, winter 1943-44

Taken from photographs of a motorised element of this unit, this first lieutenant wears the M1943 padded, hooded winter overjacket and trousers, reversible from white to camouflage – in this case the softer ‘marsh’ pattern rather than the original ‘splinter’. The regulation rank patches for all garments without shoulder straps were worn on the left sleeve in green on black. Issue woollen gloves, an officer’s field belt with a holstered Walther P38, and marching boots complete the outfit. Despite the late date he still wears his M1938 ‘officer’s new style field cap’, piped silver at the crown seam and the front of the turn-up; and still has the yellow cavalry soutache over the cockade. Above this is pinned the bronze ‘Swedte eagle’ tradition badge recalling the old 1st Brandenburg Dragoon Regiment, and awarded in the 1920s to elements of 6.Reiter Regiment. It was adopted in 1943 by Kav Regt Mitte (presumably via the Cavalry Unit Von Böselager); and was finally worn by several units of 3.Kavallerie Brigade/Division in 1944/45.

H2: SS-Sturmbannführer, 22.SS Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division ‘Maria Theresia’; Budapest, winter 1944/45

Composite, partly from a photo of SS-Stubaf.Toni Ameiser. This officer held combat commands at every level in SS Kav Regts 1 & 2 in 1941–44; he was awarded the Knight’s Cross for his leadership of ‘Kampfgruppe Ameiser’ formed from survivors of SS Kav Regt 17

in the Kovel Pocket. He commanded that regiment when it was reformed as part of the new 22nd ‘Maria Theresia’ Div, and survived the Budapest catastrophe to lead SS Kav Regt 94 of the 37th ‘Lützow’ Div in the last days of the war. His photo is important evidence for the (sometimes questioned) existence of the cornflower collar patch of the ‘Maria Theresia’ Division. We have added here an M1943 Einheitsfeldmütze with silver officer’s crown piping; the metal skull badge is worn on the front, and the SS national eagle

Enlisted man’s field cap with cavalry yellow soutache surrounding the green-backed cockade, and the bronze ‘Swedte eagle’ recalling the old 1st Brandenburg Dragoons. This was adopted by Kavallerie Regiment Mitte in 1943, and apparently by several units of 3rd Cavalry Division in 1945 – see Plate H1. Since the cap was collected in England in the early 1960s, it may well have come from a prisoner of that formation captured by the British 8th Army in Austria.



A cavalry major, believed to be from Aufklärungs Abteilung 33, wearing field-grey uniform of ‘Panzer’ cut; he may belong to a self-propelled gun squadron, but this jacket was adopted late in the war by other motorised units. On his M1938 field cap he displays the bronze ‘Swedte Adler’ badge originally awarded in 1921–26 to the regimental staff, 2nd and 4th Sqns of 6.Reiter (later, 6.Kavallerie) Regiment. It was retained by divisional reconnaissance units formed from them, e.g. Kradschützen Bataillon 3 (1937); and probably Aufklärungs Abteilung 33 of 33.Infanterie Division, later transformed into 15.Panzer Division.

(perhaps) on the left side. With the SS version of the winter overjacket, here reversible from white to an autumn ‘oakleaf’ pattern, he wears SS officer’s service dress and belt. The major’s rank patch is worn on the left sleeve.

H3: Oberstleutnant, 5.Kavallerie Regiment ‘Feldmarschall von Mackensen’, 4.Kavallerie Division; Austria, May 1945

From photographs taken immediately before the unit’s surrender to British troops. This lieutenant-colonel wears a conventional service cap and tunic with an unusual array of unit distinctions and decorations. The Prussian death’s-head tradition badge previously worn by elements of 5.Reiter Regt and Kav Regt Nord was inherited by the revived 5.Kav Regt, and is displayed on the cap and shoulder straps. In 1944 the regiment was granted the honour title ‘Feldmarschall von Mackensen’, and this silver-on-black cuff title.

Its use is confirmed by a photo of a field officer, who also wears the unusual badge adopted in 1944/45 by 4.Kav Div – a yellow armshield, with black rim and double opposed horse-head motifs, worn on the right sleeve. Personal decorations include the Knight’s Cross at the throat; German Cross in Gold on the right breast; Close Combat Clasp, Iron Cross 1st Class, General Assault Badge and Wound Badge on the left breast; and the ribbon of the Iron Cross with the gold Honour Roll Clasp.



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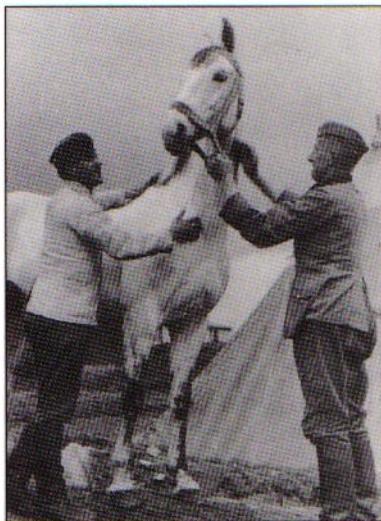
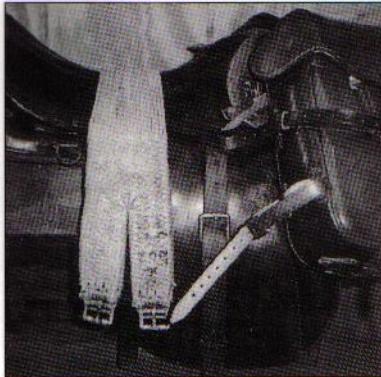
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